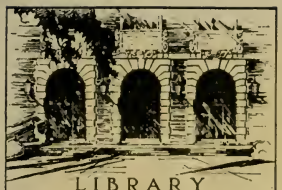

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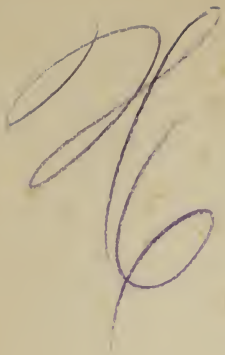

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PARCELAS
NARBERTH

MR. JERVIS

BY

B. M. CROKER

AUTHOR OF

"PRETTY MISS NEVILLE," "DIANA BARRINGTON," "A BIRD OF PASSAGE,"
"A FAMILY LIKENESS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1894

"Lord of himself, though not of lands;
And having nothing, yet hath all."

SIR H. WOTTON.

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PARCGLAS,
NARBETH

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PARCGLAS, NARBERTH

MR. JERVIS.

CHAPTER I.

A GIRL IN A THOUSAND.

"I SUPPOSE I must write, and say she may come. Personally, I shall be delighted to have her; but I'm afraid Granby will think a girl in the house rather a bore. Three *is* such an awkward number in India!"

"And sometimes in other places," added a lady who sat on the fender-stool, blowing a great wood fire, with a preposterously small pair of bellows.

"You know what I mean, Milly," retorted her companion, a handsome, indolent-looking woman, who reclined in an easy-chair, with an open letter in her lap. "Houses out here are only built for two, as a rule—especially in cantonments. A victoria or

pony-cart holds but two, and two is a much more manageable number for dinners and tiffins. Still, I shall be glad to have a girl to chaperon; it will give me an object in life, and more interest in going out."

"Could you take more?" asked the lady with the bellows, casting a sly smile over her shoulder.

"To be sure I could, you disagreeable little creature! When a woman is no longer quite young, and her days of romance are at an end, the hopes and prospects of a pretty companion give her another chance in the matrimonial lucky-bag—a chance at second-hand, but still sufficiently exciting. Alas! life after a certain age is like a bottle of flat soda-water."

"I do not think so," rejoined the lady with the bellows, stoutly.

"No; I should be surprised if you did. You are so sympathetic and energetic. You throw yourself heart and soul into Dorcas meetings, bazaars, nurse-tending, and other people's joys or afflictions. Now,

my sympathies and energies rarely extend beyond Granby and myself. I am becoming torpid. I can scarcely get up the steam for a ball; even the prospect of cutting out old Mother Brande fails to rouse me. However, when I have a charming niece to marry—and to marry well—things will assume a different aspect. How amusing it will be to eclipse the other girls and their scheming mothers; how gratifying to see all the best *partis* in the place grovelling at her feet! Her triumphs will be mine." And Mrs. Langrishe slowly closed her heavy eyelids, and appeared—judging from her expression—to be wrapped in some beatific vision. From this delicious contemplation she was abruptly recalled by the prosaic question—

"How old is she?"

"Let me see—dear, dear me! Yes," sitting erect and opening her fine eyes to their widest extent, "why, strictly between ourselves, she must be twenty-six. How time flies! She is my eldest brother's

daughter, one of a large family. Fanny, my sister in Calcutta, had her out eighteen months ago, and now she is obliged to go home, and wants to hand Lalla over to me."

"I understand," assented her listener, with a sagacious nod.

"Can you also understand, that, simply because Fanny and I have no children of our own, our people seem to expect us to provide for their olive-branches? I don't quite see it myself, though I do send them my old dresses. Now let me read you my letter," unfolding it as she spoke.

"450, Chowringhee, Feb. 22nd.

"DEAREST IDA,

"The doctors here say that Richard must positively go home at once. He has been out too long, and it is quite time that another member of the firm took a turn in the East. He has been working hard, and it is essential for him to have a complete holiday; and I must accompany him—a step for which I was quite

unprepared. I have taken a house at Simla for the season—that I can easily relet and get off my hands; but what am I to do with dear little Lalla?

"The poor child only came out last cold weather year, and cannot endure the idea of leaving India—and no wonder, with any number of admirers, and a box of new dresses just landed by the mail steamer! I had intended giving her such a gay season, and sending Dick home alone; but now all my nice little schemes have been knocked on the head—how soon a few days, even a few hours, out here alters all one's plans! And now to come to the gist of my letter—will you take Lalla? I would not trust her with any one but her own aunt, though I know that Mrs. Monty-Kute is dying to have her. You will find her a most amusing companion; no one could be dull with Lalla in the house. She is a pretty girl, and will do you credit, and is certain to be the belle of the place. She has rather a nice little voice, plays the

banjo and guitar, and dances like a professional. As to her disposition, nothing in this world is capable of ruffling her serene temper—I cannot think who she takes after, for it is not a *family* trait—I have never once seen her put out, and that is more than can be said for a girl in a thousand. In fact, she *is* a girl in a thousand. I can send her to you with a lovely outfit, a new habit and saddle, and her pony, if you wish. I am sure, dear, you will receive her if you can possibly manage it; and do your best to get her well *settled*, for you know poor Eustace has Charlotte and Sophy now quite grown up; even May is eighteen. You are so clever, so popular, so full of sense, dearest Ida—so superior to my stupid self—that if you do consent to take Lalla under your wing, her fortune is practically made. We have engaged passages in the *Paramatta*, which sails on the twelfth, so write by return of post to

"Your loving sister,

"Fanny Crauford."

"Fanny is quite right," said Mrs. Langrishe, with a slight tinge of contempt in her tone. "She is by no means clever—just an impulsive, good-natured goose, without a scrap of tact, and is taken in and imposed on on all sides. I won't have the pony, that is positive, and gram ten seers for the rupee."

"Then you have quite decided to take the young lady?" exclaimed her companion incredulously.

"Yes;" now leaning back and clasping two long white hands behind her head. "Pretty, amusing, accomplished, good-tempered—I don't see *how* I can possibly say no this time, though hitherto I have steadily set my face against having out one of my nieces. I have always said it was so dreadfully unfair to Granby. However, this niece is actually stranded in the country, and it would look so odd if I declined; besides, I shall like to have her; we shall mutually benefit one another. She will amuse me—rejuvenate me; be useful

in the house—arrange flowers, write notes, read to me, dust the ornaments, make coffee and salad, and do all sorts of little odd jobs, and ultimately cover me with glory by making the match of the season!"

"And on your part—what is to be your *rôle?*"

"I will give her a charming home; I will have all the best men here, and I will take her everywhere; give her, if necessary, a couple of smart new ball-dresses, and that too delicious opera-mantle that has grown too small for me."

"Or you too large for it—which?" inquired Mrs. Sladen, with a slight elevation of her eyebrows.

"Milly, how odious you can be!"

"And about Major Langrishe?" continued Milly, unabashed.

"Oh, Granby will be all right; but I must write to Fanny by this post, and say that I shall be delighted to have Lalla. Pour out the tea like a good little creature, whilst I scribble a line; the dâk goes down at six."

The other lady, who had kindled the fire and was now making tea, was not, as might be supposed, the mistress of the house, but merely an old friend who had dropped in for a chat this cold March afternoon. She was a slight, delicate-looking woman, with dark hair, dark eyes, and numerous lines on her thin, careworn face, though she was barely thirty. No one ever dreamt of calling Mrs. Sladen pretty, but most women voted her "a darling," and all men "a little brick." Married in her teens, before she knew her own mind (but when her relations had thoroughly made up theirs), to an elderly eligible, she had become, from the hour she left the altar, the slave of a selfish, irascible husband, whose mental horizon was bordered by two tables—the dinner-table and the card-table—and whose affections were entirely centred in his own portly person. Milly Fraser's people were on the eve of quitting India; they were poor; they had a large and expensive family at home; otherwise they might

have hesitated before giving their pretty Milly (she *was* pretty in those days) to a man more than double her age, notwithstanding that he was drawing good pay, and his widow would enjoy a pension. They would have discovered—had they made inquiries—that he was heavily in debt to the banks; that he could not keep a friend or a servant; and that, after all, poor young Hastings, of the staff-corps, whom they had so ruthlessly snubbed, would have made a more satisfactory son-in-law.

Mrs. Sladen had two little girls in England, whom her heart yearned over—little girls being brought up among strangers at a cheap suburban school. How often had her husband solemnly promised that "next year she should go home and see the children;" but, when the time came, he invariably hardened his heart, like Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and would not let her go. If she went, who was to manage the house and servants, and see after his

dinner and his comforts? *He* was not going to be left in the hands of a khansamah! And, moreover, where was the money for her passage to come from? He had not a rupee to spare (for her).

Colonel Sladen was a shrewd man when his own interests were concerned. He was alive to the fact that he was not popular, but that things were made pleasant to him all round for the sake of the unfortunate lady whom he harried, and bullied, and drove with a tongue like the lash of a slaver's whip. Yes; if she went home, it would make a vast difference in his comfort, socially and physically. Many a rude rebuff she had saved him; many a kindness was done to him for her sake; and many a woman fervently thanked her good genius that she was not his wife. In spite of her uncongenial partner, Mrs. Sladen managed to be cheerful, and generally bright and smiling, ready to nurse the sick, to decorate the club for dances, to help girls to compose ball-dresses, to open her heart to all

their troubles, and to give them sympathy and sound advice. "Oh, do not marry a man simply because your people wish it," she might have said (but she never did), "and merely because he is considered a good match; far better to go home and earn your bread as a shop-assistant, or even a slavey. Take a lesson from *my* fate."

Mrs. Langrishe, on the other hand, ruled her dear Granby with a firm but gracious sway. *Their* match had been made in England, and had proved in one respect a severe and mutual disappointment. Well, "disappointment" is an ugly word; shall we say "surprise"? Captain Langrishe had been attracted by Ida Paske's handsome face, stately deportment, and magnificent toilettes. He was impressed by her superb indifference to money—rumour endowed her with a large income, and rumour had no real grounds for this agreeable assertion. Ida was one of a numerous family, was good-looking, self-reliant, ambitious, and eight and twenty. Her dresses

were unpaid for, and her face was her fortune. She, on her part, believed the insignificant-looking little officer—whose pale profile looked exactly as if it were cut out of a deal board—to be enormously rich. He, too, affected to despise outlay, and kept hunters, and talked of his yacht. He was going to India, immediately, and the wedding was hurried on; but long ere the happy pair had reached Bombay, they had discovered the real state of affairs. He knew that his bride was penniless; and she was aware that the hunters had been hired, the yacht had been a loan, and that three hundred a year, besides his pay, was the utmost limit of her husband's purse. They were a wise couple, and made the best of circumstances; and by-and-by Captain Langrishe came to the conclusion that he had got hold of a treasure, after all! His Ida was full of tact and worldly wisdom, and possessed administrative powers of the highest order. She understood the art of keeping up appearances, and laid to her

heart that scriptural text which says, "As long as thou doest well unto thyself, men will speak well of thee." She ensured her husband a comfortable home, studied his tastes, flattered his weaknesses, was always serene, affectionate, and well-dressed. Her dinners were small but celebrated; her entrées and savouries, a secret between her cook and herself. She did not dispense indiscriminate hospitalities—no, she merely entertained a few important officials, smart women, and popular men, who would be disposed to noise abroad the fame of her dainty feasts, and to pay her back again with interest. Shabby people, and insignificant acquaintances, never saw the interior of her abode, which was the embodiment of comfort and taste. Her dresses were well chosen and costly; diamonds sparkled on her fingers and on her neck; and though but till recently a captain's wife, her air and manner of calm self-approval was such, that the wives of higher officials meekly accepted her at her own

valuation, and frequently suffered her to thrust them into the background and usurp their place. Such was her ability, that people took the cue from her, and valued an invitation to afternoon tea with Mrs. Langrishe far above an elaborate dinner with less exclusive hostesses.

Neither the furious attacks of her enemies (and she had not a few), nor the occasional indiscretions of her friends, ever ruffled the even temperament of this would-be "grande dame." It was an astonishing but patent fact that she invariably occupied, so to speak, a chief seat; that she was always heralded on her arrival at a station—met, entertained, and regretfully sped. Whilst ladies as worthy languished in the dâk bungalow, and drove in rickety ticca gharries, she had the carriages of rajahs at her disposal, and was overwhelmed with attentions and invitations. Surely all this was amply sufficient to make these women "talk her over" and hold her at arms' length. Men who knew Captain

Langrishe's resources marvelled amongst themselves, and said, "Gran has very little besides his pay; how the deuce does he do it? Look at his wife's dresses! And they give the best dinners in the place. There will be a fine smash there some day!" But years rolled on, and there was no sign of any such crisis. The truth was that Granby Langrishe had married an exceedingly able woman—a woman who thoroughly understood the art of genteel pushing and personal advertisement. She had persistently edged—yea, driven her husband to the front, and he now enjoyed an excellent appointment at the price of the two dewy tears that stood in his Ida's expressive eyes when bemoaning his bad luck to an influential personage. The Langrishes were drawing two thousand rupees a month,—and were held in corresponding esteem.

Mrs. Langrishe does not look forty—far from it. She has taken excellent care of herself—no early rising, no midday visiting, for this wise matron. She is tall, with a

fine figure, alas! getting somewhat stout; her brows are straight and pencilled; beneath them shine a pair of effective grey eyes; her features are delicately cut; if her face has a fault, it is that her jaw is a *little* too square. Whatever people may say of Ida Langrishe, they cannot deny that she is remarkably handsome, and as clever as she is handsome. As a spinster, she had not been entirely successful in her own aims; but it would go hard, if, with her brains, her circle of acquaintances, and her valuable experience, she did not marry her niece brilliantly.

CHAPTER II.

"TELL ME ALL THE NEWS."

The French windows of Mrs. Langrishe's drawing-room opened into a deep stone verandah embowered in honeysuckle and passion flowers, and commanded a matchless view, irrespective of the foreground, in which Mrs. Sladen's rickshaw is the chief feature, or the gravel sweep, grass garden, and beds of pale wintry roses; but beyond the pineclad hills, among which red roofs are peeping, beyond the valley of rhododendrons, and a bold purple range, behold the snows! a long, long barrier of the everlasting hills, to such as the eyes of the psalmist had never been lifted. People may whisper that they were disappointed

in the Taj, that Delhi was a delusion, and the marble rocks a snare; but who can declare that the snows were beneath his expectations? And if he were to say so, who would be found to believe him? The evening breeze is raw and chill, it has travelled sixty miles from those icy slopes, it creeps up the khud, and warns the shivering roses that the sun has set—it stirs the solemn deodars as they stand in dark outline against the sky.

Mrs. Langrishe, rising from her writing-table, letter in hand, sweeps back to her friend, who is again sitting on the fender-stool, staring into the fire, thinking, perchance, of those bygone days when *she* was a girl whose friends were anxious to get her settled.

"Milly," said her hostess, "you are passing the post-office, and you can post this for me; you had better go now, dear, as you know you have had a sore throat, and it is getting late."

Mrs. Sladen rose at once; she was

accustomed to being sent on errands and to being made use of by her intimates. She pulled on her cheap gloves, twisted her stringy boa round her neck, and held out her hand for the letter that was to bring Miss Paske to Shirani. As her friend stooped and kissed her, she looked up at her wistfully, and said—

"Ida, if this girl comes to you, you won't think of her only as a marketable article, will you? You will allow her to marry—if she does marry—to please herself, won't you, dear?"

"You silly, romantic little person!" exclaimed the other, patting her cheek with two solid taper fingers. "What an absurd question. As if any girl is ever married against her will in these enlightened days!"

Mrs. Sladen made no answer beyond an involuntary sigh. She went out to the verandah, and got into her rickshaw without another word and ere she was whirled away, nodded a somewhat melancholy fare-

well to her handsome, prosperous-looking friend who, clad in a rich tea-gown, had framed herself for a moment in the open doorway, and called out imperiously—

"The post goes at six; you have jus ten minutes." Then, with a shiver, Mrs. Langrishe closed the window and returned to her comfortable fireside. "Poor Milly!" she muttered, as she warmed one well-shod foot. "She was always odd and sentimental. Marry to please herself—yes, by all means—but she must also marry to please *me!*"

* * * * *

A rickshaw (the popular conveyance in the Himalayan hill-stations) is a kind of glorified bath-chair or grown-up perambulator, light and smart, and drawn and pushed by four men; it flies along flat roads and down hills as rapidly as a pony-cart, especially if your Jampannis are racing another team.

Mrs. Sladen's rickshaw was old; the hood, of cheap American leather, was

cracked and blistered, it had a list to one side, and her Jampannis wore the shabby clothes of last year—but, then, their mistress did the same! As they dashed down hill, they nearly came into collision with a smart Dyke's cee-spring vehicle, and a quartette of men in brilliant (Rickett's) blue and yellow liveries. The rickshaw contained an elderly lady of ample proportions, with flaxen hair and a good-humoured handsome face surmounting two chins. This was Mrs. Brande, the wife of Pelham Brande, Esq., a distinguished member of the Civil Service.

"Kubbardar, kubbardar!—take care, take care!" she shrieked. Then to Mrs. Sladen, "My gracious! how you do fly! but you are a light weight. Well, come alongside of me, my dear, and tell me all the news; this place is as dull as ditch-water, so few people here. Next year, I shan't come up so early."

"I believe every house is taken," said Mrs. Sladen, cheerfully, as they rolled along

side by side. "Even the Cedars, and the Monastery, and Haddon Hall."

"You don't say so! The chimneys smoke beyond anything. I pity whoever is going there."

"A bachelor, I believe, a Captain Waring, has taken it for the season, as it's close to the mess."

"In the regiment that's marching up—the Scorpions?"

"No; I believe he is out of the service, and coming up for the hot weather, and to try and get some shooting in Thibet later on."

"Then he must have money?" wagging her head sagaciously.

"Yes, I dare say he has. I'm told it is going to be a gay season."

"That's what they always say," replied Mrs. Brande, impatiently. "I'll believe it when I see it. But I did hear that Mrs. Kane is expecting a brother that is a baronet: he's coming up to see the hills; he has been globe-trotting all winter. And

so you have been up with the Duchess—she's all alone, isn't she?"

"Yes, for the present; but she will soon have a niece with her—a niece from Calcutta."

"A niece!" sharply, and leaning half out of the rickshaw. "What niece?"

"Her brother's daughter, Miss Paske; she is said to be very pretty and accomplished, and attractive in every way."

"You need not tell me *that!*" in accents of concentrated contempt. "Is Mrs. Langrishe the woman to saddle herself with an ugly girl? She'll be having grand parties now; all the rich young fellows, and the *baronet*—no poor subalterns, you'll see—and she will get her off her hands in no time. Just the sort of thing she will like, and a fine excuse for having packs of men dangling about the house."

"Oh, Mrs. Brande, you know that is not her style," expostulated her companion.

"Well, well, she is your friend—a schoolfellow, too—though *you* must have been in

the infant-school, so I'll say no more—but you know I am not double-faced, and I cannot abide her, and her airs, and her schemes, and her always pushing herself to the front, and sitting in the general's pew, and being the first to ask that Austrian prince to dinner, and getting up at parties and sailing out before the commissioner's wife — such impudence!—and people put up with her. If poor little Mrs. Jones was to do such things—and she has a better right, being an honourable's daughter—I'd like to know what would be said? But there's no fear of Mrs. Jones; there's no brass about *her*," and Mrs. Brande gave a bounce, that made the cee-springs quiver!

"Now, Mrs. Brande, you forget that Ida is my friend."

"Ay, and better be her friend than her enemy! Well, here is my turn, and here we part; and, with a valedictory wave of her podgy hand, in another instant Mrs. Brande was thundering down the narrow

road that led to the best house in Sharani —her own comfortable, hospitable dwelling.

Mrs. Sladen posted her letter, and went on to the club and reading-room, a long, low building overlooking a series of terraces and tennis-courts, and the chief resort of the whole station. As she entered the gate, she encountered an elderly gentleman, with beetling brows, a coarse grey moustache, and a portly figure, riding a stout black pony.

"Been looking for you everywhere," he bellowed; "where the mischief have you been? Swilling tea as usual, I suppose? Soper and Rhodes are coming to take 'pot luck,' so go home at once—and, I say, I hear there is fish at Manockjees', just come up; call in on your way, and fetch it in the rickshaw."

Exit Colonel Sladen to his evening rubber; exit Mrs. Sladen to carry home much-travelled fish, and possibly to cook the chief portion of the dinner.

CHAPTER III.

"OTHER PEOPLE HAS NIECES TOO."

Mrs. Sladen had not only given Mrs. Brande a piece of news; she had introduced her to a grand idea — an idea that took root and grew and flourished in that lady's somewhat empty mind, as she sat alone in her drawing-room over a pleasant wood-fire, which she shared impartially with a sleek, self-conscious fox-terrier.

All the world admitted that once upon a time "old Mother Brande" must have been a beautiful woman. Even now her fair skin, blue eyes, and chiselled features entitled her to rank as a highly respectable wreck. Who would have thought that

refined, fastidious, cynical Pelham Brande would have married the niece of a lodging-house keeper? Perhaps if he had anticipated the career which lay before him—how unexpectedly and supremely successful he was to be, how the fierce light inseparable from high places was to beat upon his fair-haired Sarabella—he might have hesitated ere he took such a rash and romantic step. Little did he suppose that his fair-haired Sally, who had waited so capably on him, would one day herself be served by gorgeous scarlet-clad Government chupprassis; or that she was bound to walk out of a room before the wives of generals and judges, and that she would have a "position" to maintain! But who is as wise at two and twenty as he is at fifty-two? At two and twenty Pelham Brande had just passed for the India Civil Service, and was lodging in London; and whilst preparing for the Bar he got typhoid fever, and very nearly died. He was carefully tended by Mrs. Batt, his landlady,

and her lovely niece Sarabella, who was as fair as a June rose, and as innocent as a March lamb.

The best medical authorities assure us, that nothing is so conducive to convalescence as a skilful and pretty nurse, and under the influence of Sara's ministrations Mr. Brande made rapid progress towards recovery, but fell a victim to another malady—which proved incurable. He did not ask his relations for permission or advice, but married his bride one morning at St. Clement Danes, took a week's trip to Dover, and two first-class passages to Bombay.

As a rule, junior civilians are despatched without ruth to lonely jungle districts, where they never see another white face for weeks, and their only associates are their native subordinates, their staffs of domestics, and the simple dwellers in the neighbouring villages. Now and then they may chance on an opium official, or a forest officer, and exchange cheroots, and newspapers;

but these meetings are rare. After a busy university career, after an immense strain on the mental faculties, necessary to passing a severe examination, the dead sameness of that life, the silence and loneliness of the jungle (aggravated by the artless prattle of the office baboo), is enough to unhinge the strongest mind. Miles and miles from the haunts of his countrymen, from books and telegrams, and the stir and excitement of accustomed associations, the plunge from the roar of the London streets, and life at high pressure, to the life in a solitary up-country district, is indeed a desperate one; especially if the new-comer's eyes and ears are not open to the great book of Nature—if he sees no beauty in stately peepul-trees, tracts of waving grain, venerable temples, and splendid sunsets; if he does not care to beat for pig, or shoot the thirsty snipe, but merely sits in his tent door in the cool of the evening, his labours o'er, and languishes for polo, cards, and theatres. Then he may well

curse his lot; he is undeniably in a bad way.

Pelham Brande had nothing to fear from loneliness or *ennui*. Sara made him an excellent helpmate. She picked up the language and customs with surprising facility; she proved a capital housekeeper, and as shamelessly hard at a bargain as any old native hag. But she never took to books, or to the letter "h." For years the Brandes lived in out-of-the-way districts, and insignificant stations, until by slow degrees his services and abilities conducted him to the front. As advancing time promoted him, his wife declined in looks, and increased in bulk, and her tastes and eccentricities became fixed. Pelham was not actually ashamed of his partner, but he was alive to the fact, that, with a cultivated gentlewoman at the head of his establishment, he would have occupied a vastly more agreeable social position. But he never admitted—what his friends loudly affirmed—that, as he sat opposite to Sara

day after day, he was also sitting face to face with the one great mistake of his life!

Twice he had taken her to Australia for six months, but never (nor did she desire it) to her native land. Once, years ago, he ran home himself, and was received by his relations, as relations generally welcome a wealthy, childless, and successful man. They even brought themselves to ask, somewhat timidly, for Sara; and she, on her part, sent them generous consignments of curry powder, red pepper, and her own special and far-famed brand of chutney. The good lady had not many resources beyond housekeeping. She read the daily paper, and now and then a society novel, if it was plentifully peopled with lords and ladies; she could write an ordinary note, invitation, or refusal, and a letter (with a dictionary beside her). She was fond of her cows, and poultry, and adored her dog Ben; gave excellent, but desperately dull dinners; dressed sumptuously in gorgeous

colours; enjoyed a gossip; loved a game of whist—and hated Mrs. Langrishe. She lived a monotonous and harmless life, vibrating between the hills and plains each season, with clockwork regularity.

As Mrs. Brande sat before her fire, and watched the crackling pinewood, she was not happy. Officially she was the chief lady of the place, the "Burra mem sahib;" but clever Mrs. Langrishe was the real leader of society, and bore away all the honours—the kernel, so to speak, of distinction, leaving her but the miserable shell. With a young and pretty girl as her companion, she would be more insufferable and more sought after than ever. As it was, she, Sara Brande, could make but little stand against her; and once her enemy was allied to a charming and popular niece, she might figuratively lay down her arms and die. She was a friendless, desolate old woman. If her little Annie had lived, it would have been different; and she had no belongings, no nieces. No!

but—happy thought!—Pelham had no less than three, who were poor and, by all accounts, pretty. He had helped their mother, his sister, to educate them; he sent them money now and then. Why should she not adopt one of these girls, and have a niece also? Yes, she would write herself; she would speak to Pelham that very evening after dinner (it was his favourite dinner). The more she became accustomed to the idea, as she turned it over in her mind, the more she was filled with delight, resolve, and anticipation. The girl's route, steamer, room, dresses, were already chosen, and she was in the act of selecting her future husband, when Mr. Brande entered, brisk and hungry.

After dinner, when Mr. Brande was smoking a cigarette, his artful wife opened the subject next to her heart, and remarked, as she handed him a cup of fragrant coffee—

"Pelham, you are often away on tour, are you not? and I feel uncommon lonely,

I can tell you. I am not as active or as cheerful as I used to be. I'm too old for dancing, and tennis, and riding. Not that I ever was much hand at them."

"Well, do you want to come on tour? or shall I buy you a pony, or hire you a companion?" inquired Mr. Brande facetiously—a clean-shaven, grey-haired man, with thin mobile lips, keen eyes, and, at a little distance, a singularly boyish appearance. "What would you like to do?"

"I should like to ride and dance by proxy," was the unexpected answer. "Let us ask out one of those Gordon girls, your nieces. I'd be very good to her; and you know, Pel, I'm a lonely creature, and if our own little Annie had lived, I would not be wanting to borrow another woman's daughter to keep me company."

Mr. Brande was surveying his wife with a severely judicial expression; it relaxed as she spoke of their only child, buried far away, under a tamarind tree, on the borders of Nepaul.

Yes, their little Annie would have been five and twenty had she lived, and doubtless as lovely as Sally Batt, who had turned his head, mitigated his success, and whom he rarely repented of having married.

"Your sister has three girls," she continued, "and she is badly off. What is the pension of a colonel's widow? Why, less than some folks give their cooks."

"It is not considerable, certainly, and Carrie finds it hard enough to make both ends meet; she never was much of a manager. But, Sally, a girl is a great responsibility, and you are not accustomed to young people."

"No; but I can learn to study them, for I'm fond of them. Say 'Yes,' Pel, and I'll write. We will pay her passage, of course, and I'll meet her myself at Allahabad."

Mr. Brande tossed the end of his cigarette into the fire, fixed his eye-glass firmly in his eye, and contemplated his wife in silence. At last he said—

"May I ask what has put this idea into your head all of a sudden?"

"It's not—exactly—sudden," she stammered; "I've often a sort of lonely feel. But I must truthfully say that I never thought of your niece till to-day, when I heard that Mrs. Langrishe is getting up one of hers from Calcutta."

Mr. Brande jerked the glass hastily on to his waistcoat, and gave a peculiarly long whistle.

"I see! And you are not going to be beaten by Mrs. Langrishe—you mean to run an opposition girl, and try which will have the best dresses, the most partners, and be married first? No, no, Sally! I utterly refuse to lend myself to such a scheme, or to allow one of Carrie's daughters to enter for that sort of competition." And he crossed his legs, and took another cigarette.

"But listen to me, Pel," rising as she spoke; "I declare to you that I won't do what you say, and, any way, *your* niece

will be in quite a different position to the Langrishe's girl. I'll be as good to her as if she was my own—I will indeed!" and her voice trembled with eagerness. "I'm easy to get on with—look how long I keep my servants," she pleaded. "These Gordons are your nearest kin; you ought to do something for them. I suppose they will come in for all your money. Your sister is delicate, and if anything happened to her you'd have to take, not one girl, but the whole *three*. How would you like that? Now, if one of them was nicely married, she would make a home for her sisters."

"You are becoming quite an orator, and there is something in what you say. Well, I'll think it over, and let you know to-morrow, Sally. As to leaving them my money, I'm only fifty-two, and I hope to live to spend a good slice of it myself." And then Mr. Brande took up a literary paper and affected to be absorbed in its contents. But although he had the paper

before him, he was not reading; he was holding counsel with himself.

He had not seen Carrie's girls since they counted their ages in double figures; they were his nearest of kin, were very poor, and led dull lives in an out-of-the-way part of the world. Yes, he ought to do something, and it would please the old lady to give her a companion, and a pretty, fresh young face about the house would not be disagreeable to himself. But what would a refined and well-educated English girl think of her aunt, with her gaudy dresses, bad grammar, mania for precedence, and brusque, unconventional ways? Well, one thing was certain, she would soon discover that she had a generous hand and a kind heart.

The next morning Mr. Brande, having duly slept on the project, gave his consent and a cheque, and Mrs. Brande was so dazzled with her scheme, and so dazed with all she had to think of, that she added up her bazaar account wrong, and gave the cook a glass of vinegar in mistake for

sherry—which same had a fatal effect on an otherwise excellent pudding.

In order to compose her letter comfortably, and without distraction, Mrs. Brande shut herself up in her own room, with writing materials and dictionary, and told the bearer to admit no one, not even Mrs. Sladen. After two rough copies and two hours' hard labour, the important epistle was finished and addressed, and as Mrs. Brande stamped it with a firm hand, she said to herself aloud—

"I do trust Ben won't be jealous. I hope he will like her!"

Being mail day, Mrs. Brande took it to the post herself, and as she turned from dropping it into the box, she met her great rival coming up the steps, escorted by two men. Mrs. Langrishe was always charming to her enemy, because it was bad style to quarrel, and she knew that her pretty phrases and pleasing smiles infuriated the other lady to the last degree; and she said, as she cordially offered a neatly gloved hand—

"How do you *do?* I have not seen you for ages! I know it's my business to call, as I came up last; but, really I have so many engagements, and such tribes of visitors——"

"Oh, pray don't apologize!" cried Mrs. Brande, reddening; "I'd quite forgotten—I really thought you had called!" (May Sara Brande be forgiven for this terrible falsehood.)

It was now Mrs. Langrishe's turn to administer a little nip.

"Of course you are going to dine at the Maitland-Perrys' next week?" (well knowing that she had not been invited). "Every one who is *anybody* is to be there. There are not many up yet, it is so early; but it will be uncommonly smart—as far as it goes—and given for the baronet!"

"No, I am not going, I have not been asked," rejoined Mrs. Brande with a gulp. She generally spoke the truth, however much against the grain.

"Not asked! how very odd. Well," with

a soothing smile, "I dare say they will have you at their *next*. I hear that we are to expect quite a gay season."

"And I was told that there will be no men."

"Really! That won't affect you much, as you don't ride, or dance, or go to picnics; but it is sad news for poor me, for I am expecting a niece up from Calcutta, and I hope the place will be lively."

"But I *do* mind, Mrs. Langrishe, just as much as you do," retorted the other, with a triumphant toss of her head. "Perhaps you may not be aware that I am expecting a niece, too?" (How could Mrs. Langrishe possibly divine what the good lady herself had only known within the last few hours?) "Yours is from Calcutta, but mine is all the way from England!" And her glance inferred that the direct Europe importation was a very superior class of consignment. Then she added, "Other people has nieces too, you see!" And with a magnificent bow, she flounced down the steps,

bundled into her rickshaw, and was whirled away.

Mrs. Langrishe stood watching the four blue and yellow jampannis, swiftly vanishing in a cloud of dust, with a smile of malicious amusement.

"Other people has nieces too, you see!" turning to her companions with admirable mimicry. "She is not to be outdone. What fun it is! Cannot you fancy what she will be like—Mrs. Brande's niece, all the way from England? If not, I can inform you. She will have hair the colour of barley-sugar, clothes the colours of the rainbow, and not an 'h'!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE THREE YOUNG MAIDS OF HOYLE.

It was true that Mrs. Gordon and her daughters resided in a dull, out-of-the-way part of the world; but they could not help themselves. They lived at Hoyle, in the first instance, because it was cheap; and, in the second place, because living at Hoyle had now become second nature to Mrs. Gordon, and nothing short of a fire or an earthquake could remove her.

Hoyle is in the south of England, within a stone's throw of a shingly beach, and commands a full view of the white shores of France. It is an old-fashioned hamlet, at least fifty years behind the age, where the curfew is still sounded, the sight of a

telegraph envelope is only interpreted as a messenger of death, and is cut off from the bustling outer world by the great expanse of Romney Marsh. In deference to this *fin de siècle* age, a single line of rail crawls across the seaside desert, and once or twice a day a sleepy train stops just one mile short of the village. The village of Hoyle was once a chartered town, and was built many centuries before trains were invented. It was even out of the track of the lively stage-coaches, and owed its wealth and rise—and fall—entirely to its convenient proximity to the sea, its seclusion, its charming view of the opposite coast. Yes, its solid prosperity—low be it spoken—was due to smuggling. The High Street is lined by picturesque red-brick houses, which are occupied by the descendants of—shall we say sailors?—a well-to-do primitive, most respectable community, though from yonder upper window the present tenant's grandfather shot a preventive officer stone dead; and in the chimney of

the next cottage (a most innocent-looking abode) three men who were in trouble lay concealed for a whole week. The capacious cellars of the Cause is Altered inn, were, within living memory, no strangers to bales of silk and casks of brandy.

Between the village and the inn there stands a solid old red house, with a small enclosed garden in front, and a paved foot-path leading to its mean little green hall-door. The windows are narrow, the rooms irregular, and the ceilings absurdly low—but so is the rent. It suits its tenants admirably; it is warm, roomy, and cheap; it boasts of a fine walled garden at the rear, of acres of cellarage, and is known by the name of Merry Meetings. This jovial designation is not of modern date, but points back to the grand old days when it was the residence of the chief man in Hoyle; when it was club, bank, receiving-house, and fortress. Many were the carousals that took place in Mrs. Gordon's decent panelled parlour. To what grim

tales and strange oaths have its walls given ear! There have been merry meetings, of a much tamer description in the present time, when the maidens of the neighbourhood have gathered round the table, and chatted and laughed over cups of honest tea, brewed in Mrs. Gordon's thin old silver teapot. Pretty girls have discussed dress, tennis, and weddings, where formerly weather-beaten, bearded men assembled to celebrate the safe arrival of a newly-run cargo, and to appraise filmy laces, foreign silks, and cigars, and to quaff prime cognac and strange but potent waters.

The widow and her daughters have occupied Merry Meetings for fifteen years, ever since the death of Colonel Gordon. He had retired from the service and settled down near a garrison town, intending to turn his sword into a ploughshare; but in an evil moment he ventured his all in a tempting speculation, hoping thereby to double his income; but instead of which, alas! water came into the Wheal Rebecca,

and swept away every penny. Seeing nothing between him and the poor-house but a small pension, Colonel Gordon was not brave enough to face the situation, and died of a broken heart — though it was called a rapid decline—leaving his widow and three little girls to struggle with the future as best they could.

Colonel Gordon's connections were so furious with him for losing his money, that they sternly refused to assist his widow; therefore she meekly collected the remains of the domestic wreck, and retired to Hoyle with her children and an old servant, who had strongly recommended her native place, where her "mistress could live in peace and quiet until she had time to turn herself round and make plans." Mrs. Gordon took Merry Meeting, which was partly furnished, for three months, and had remained there for fifteen years. Her plans were still undeveloped; she constantly talked of moving, but never got beyond that point. Occasionally she would say,

"Well, girls, I really will give notice this term. We must move; we must decide something. I will write to a house agent. And, Honor, you need not mind getting the garden seeds, or having the kitchen whitewashed." But when to-morrow came these plans had melted into air, and the garden-seeds were set, and the kitchen renovated, as usual.

Mrs. Gordon was something of an invalid, and became more lethargic year by year, and a prey to an incurable habit of procrastination. She resigned her keys, purse, and authority into the hands of her eldest daughter, and contented herself with taking a placid interest in the garden, the weather, the daily paper, and sampling various new patent medicines. She still retained the remains of remarkable personal beauty and a fascination of manner that charmed all who came in contact with her, from the butcher's boy to the lord of the soil. People said that it was shamefully unfair to her girls, the way in which Mrs. Gordon buried

herself—and them—alive. She never made the smallest effort to better their lot, but contented herself with sitting all day in a comfortable easy-chair, making gracious remarks and looking handsome, stately, and languid.

Life was monotonous at Merry Meetings. Two or three tennis-parties in summer, two or three carpet-dances in winter, now and then a day's shopping in Hastings, were events which were varied by long gray stretches of uneventful calm. The daily paper was a most welcome arrival; and the Miss Gordons entertained as eager an expectation of letters, of stirring news, of "something coming by the post," of "something happening," as if they lived in the midst of a large and busy community.

And what of the three Miss Gordons?

Jessie, the eldest, is twenty-six, and quite surprisingly plain. She has pale eyes and a dark complexion, instead of dark eyes and a pale complexion, also a nose that would scarcely be out of place in a bur-

lesque. She is clever, strong-willed, and practical, and manages the whole family with admirable tact, including Susan, the domestic treasure.

Jessie Gordon's name is well known as the author of pretty stories in girls' and children's magazines. She earns upwards of a hundred a year by her pen (which she generally adds to the common purse), and is regarded by her neighbours with a certain amount of pride, slightly tempered with uneasiness. Supposing she were to put some of her friends into a book! However, they criticize her work sharply to her face, make a great virtue of purchasing the magazines in which her tales appear, and magnify her merits, fame, and earnings to all outsiders.

Fairy, whose real name is Flora, comes next to Jessie in age; she is about two and twenty, and has a perfectly beautiful face—a face to inspire poets and painters, faultless in outline, and illumined by a pair of pathetic blue eyes. A most delicate

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complexion—of which every care, reasonable or unreasonable, is taken—and quantities of fine sunny brown hair, combine to complete a vision of loveliness. Yes, Fairy Gordon is almost startlingly fair to see; and seen seated at a garden-party or in a ball-room, all the strange men present instantly clamour for an introduction; and when it has been effected, and the marvellously pretty girl rises to dance, behold she is a dwarf—a poor little creature, with a shrill, harsh voice, and only four feet four inches in height! Her figure is deceptive—the body very long in proportion to the limbs.

Many and many a shock has Fairy administered to a would-be partner. Did she ever read their consternation in their faces? Apparently never; for no matter who remained at home, Fairy could not endure to miss an entertainment, even a school feast or a children's party. It was an unwritten family law that Fairy must always come first, must always be shielded, petted, indulged, amused, and no one subscribed

to this rule more readily than the second Miss Gordon herself. She was keenly alive to her own beauty, and talked frankly to her intimates of her charms; but she never once referred to her short stature, and her sisters but rarely alluded to the fact between themselves, and then with bated breath. Even six inches would have made all the difference in the world; but four feet four was — well, remarkable. Of course the neighbours were accustomed to Fairy—a too suggestive name. They remembered her quite a little thing, a lovely spoilt child, a child who had never grown up. She was still a little thing, and yet she was a woman —a woman with a sharp tongue and a despotic temper. Fairy had true fairy-like fingers. She embroidered exquisitely, and made considerable sums doing church needlework, which sums were exclusively devoted to the decoration of her own little person. She was also a capital milliner and amateur dressmaker; but she had no taste for music, literature, housekeeping, or

for any of the "daily rounds, the common tasks." She left all those sort of things to her sisters.

Honor, the youngest Miss Gordon, is twenty years of age, slight, graceful, and tall—perhaps too tall. She might have spared some inches to her small relative, for she measures fairly five feet eight inches. She has an oval face, dark grey eyes, dark hair, and a radiant smile. In a family less distinguished by beauty she would have been noteworthy. As it is, some people maintain that in spite of Fairy's marvellous colouring and faultless features, they see more to admire in her younger sister—for she has the beauty of expression. Honor is the useful member of the family. Jessie could not arrange flowers, cut out a dress, or make a cake, to save her life. Honor can do all these. She has a sort of quick, magic touch. Everything she undertakes looks neat and dainty, from a hat to an apple-pie. Her inexhaustible spirits correspond with her gay, dancing eyes, and she

is the life and prop of the whole establishment. She plays the violin in quite a remarkable manner. Not that she has great execution, or can master difficult pieces, but to her audience she and her violin seem one, and there is a charm about her playing that listeners can neither explain nor resist.

The youngest Miss Gordon has her faults. Chief of these, is an undesirable bluntness and impudent recklessness of speech—a deplorable fashion of introducing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, no matter how unwelcome or how naked — and a queer, half-absent, and wholly disconcerting way of thinking aloud.

Her friends (who are many) declare that she is young, and will grow out of these peculiarities, and at any rate she is by far the most popular of the three sisters!

One gusty March morning, the sea displayed towering grey waves, with cream-coloured crests, the rain beat noisily against

the window in which Jessie Gordon stood waiting for the kettle to boil, and watching for the postman. Here he came at last, striding up the paved path in his shining oilskins, and with a thundering bang, bang! he is gone.

"The paper, a coal bill, and an Indian letter," said Jessie to Fairy, who, wrapped in a shawl, was cowering over the fire. "I'll take them upstairs whilst you watch the kettle.

Mrs. Gordon always breakfasted in bed, to "save trouble," she declared, but to whom she omitted to mention. She turned the letters over languidly, and exclaimed—

"One from India from Sara Brande. Wonders will never cease! What can she want? Well, let me have my tea at once, and when I have read her epistle, I will send it down to you. And, here—you can take the paper to Fairy."

Jessie returned to her tea-making—she and Honor took the housekeeping week about. In the middle of breakfast, Susan

stalked into the room—an unusual occurrence—and said—

"Miss Jessie, the mistress is after pulling down the bell-rope. I thought the house was on fire. You are to go upstairs to her this minute."

Jessie was absent about a quarter of an hour, and when she appeared, beaming, and with a letter in her hand, she had such an air of suppressed exultation, that it was evident to her sisters, even before she opened her lips, that the long-expected "something" had happened at last.

CHAPTER V.

AN INDIAN LETTER.

"GREAT, great news, girls!" cried Jessie, waving the letter over her head. "Mrs. Brande—I mean Aunt Sally—has written to ask one of us to go out and live with her, and she seems quite certain that her offer will be accepted, for she encloses a cheque for outfit and passage-money. It is a short invitation, too; whoever elects to see India must start within the next fortnight."

Honor and Fairy gazed at one another incredulously, and Fairy's delicate complexion changed rapidly from pink to crimson, from crimson to white.

"I'll read it to you," continued Jessie,

sitting down as she spoke. "The writing is peculiar, and some of the words are only underlined four times. Ahem!

"'Rookwood, Shirani.

"'DEAR SISTER-IN-LAW,

"'It is not often that I take up my pen, but I have something most important to say to you. I am not as young as I was, and I feel the want of some sort of company. Pelham is away a good deal, and I am left alone with Ben; he is the best-hearted creature in the world, and knows every word I say, but he can't talk, nor help in the housekeeping, nor go to balls and church, being only a dog. What would you think of letting me have one of your girls? You have three, and might spare one. Indeed, three unmarried daughters must be a really terrible anxiety to any mother. We expect to be home in about a year, so if the worst comes to the worst, you will have her back again in twelve months' time. Whoever you send,

you may be sure I will be a mother to her, and so will Pelham. She shall have the best of everything in the way of society and clothes, and I guarantee that she only knows the *nicest beaux*, and that she will be very happy. The hot weather is coming on, and travelling after April is dangerous, both by land and sea, so I would like you to send her as soon as possible. She ought to start not later than a fortnight after you receive this, otherwise, it will be no use her coming at all. She could not set out again till October, and it would not be worth her while to come to us for six months. Pel encloses a cheque for her passage, and thirty-five pounds extra for boxes, gloves, petticoats, etc. I prefer to devise her dresses *myself*, and will turn her out smart. No doubt you are not in the way of seeing the new fashions, and we are uncommonly dressy out here. If she could be in Bombay by the *middle of April*, I could meet her at Allahabad and bring her up, for I don't approve of girls travelling

alone. Pel is anxious, too, and hopes you won't refuse us. You know he has a good deal in his power; your girls are his *next-of-kin*, and a nod is as good as a *wink* to a blind horse—of course, not meaning that *you* are a blind horse. This place is gay in the season, and has plenty of tamashas; as for snakes, there is no such thing; and with regard to climate, you can make yourself *quite* easy.

"'The climatological conditions of these hill-districts are a most important element in their physical geography, and will therefore require to be treated at considerable length. An extensive discussion of the meteorology cannot be attempted, but sufficient data have already been collected to serve as a basis for general description of the climate. In this respect the Himalayas, on account of their less distance from the equator, present many points of *advantage* as compared with the Alps and other European mountains.'" (The above, with the exception of the italics, had

been boldly copied from a gazetteer found in Mr. Brande's writing-room.)

"'There is generally a fair sprinkling of young men, and of course we entertain a great deal. She shall have a nice quiet pony, and a new *rickshaw*, so we shall expect her without fail. Love to your daughters, and especially to *our* one.

"'Yours truly,

"'SARABELLA BRANDE.'

"Now, what do you think of that?" inquired Jessie, looking alternately at her two staring sisters.

"I say that it is a hoax, of course! Some joke of yours, Jessie," returned Honor, with a playful snatch at the letter. "What is all that gibberish about Uncle Pelham being a mother to one, and mother not being a blind horse, and the climatological condition of the hills, not to mention the snakes and the *beaux?* You ought to be ashamed—I could have done it better myself."

"Read it—examine the post-mark," said Jessie, now flinging it on the table.

Yes, there was no room for doubt; it was a *bona-fide* Indian epistle. As Honor turned it over critically, she suddenly exclaimed—

"Have you seen *this*—the gem of the whole production—the postscript?"

Both sisters bent forward eagerly, and there, just at the top of the last and otherwise blank sheet, was scribbled as a hasty afterthought—

"P.S.—Be sure you send the *pretty* one."

"She must be a most original old person," said Honor, with sparkling eyes. "And, in the name of Dr. Johnson, what is a 'tamasha'?"

"Ask me something easier," rejoined Jessie.

"Then what does mother say to this remarkable invitation?"

"You might know better than to ask that!" broke in Fairy, who had been listening with evident impatience. "In

this family it is, 'What does Jessie say?' What *do* you say, Jess?"

"I say, never refuse a good offer. It is only for twelve months; and, of course, one of us must go!"

"Then, will *you* go?" inquired Fairy, with elevated brows.

"Am I the pretty one?" Jessie demanded sarcastically. "I should be bundled back by the next steamer."

"No, of course; I never thought of that," rejoined her sister, meditatively. "I am the pretty one; there has never been any question of that—has there, girls?"

"No, never," returned Jessie, in her most matter-of-fact tone, and she and Honor exchanged stealthy glances.

For some seconds Fairy seemed buried in thought, as she drew patterns on the table-cloth with a fork. At last she looked up, and exclaimed—

"It is only for twelve months as you say, Jess; twelve months soon fly round." And she threw back her shawl, and leant

her elbows on the table. "Never refuse a good offer—such as a pony, a rickshaw—whatever that is—the new dresses, the best society, the best *beaux!*" and she burst into a peal of shrill laughter, as she exclaimed, "Do you know, girls, that I think I shall go!"

A pause, the result of utter stupefaction, followed this unexpected announcement.

"Yes," she continued, with increased animation, "I believe I should like it, of all things. The idea grows on me. I am thrown away here. What is the use of a pretty face if it is never seen? Did she say *thirty-five* pounds for outfit? I can make that go a long way. I don't take yards of stuff, like you two giantesses. My tailor-made and my spring dress are new. I'll just run up and talk it over with the mater." And she pushed back her chair, and bustled out of the room.

Jessie and Honor remained gazing at one another across the table, in dead suggestive silence, which was at last broken

by Jessie, who said in a tone of quiet despair—

"I wish that ridiculous letter had never come. At first I thought it a capital thing. I thought you ought to accept."

"I!" cried Honor; "and, pray, why should you select *me?*"

"For half a dozen excellent reasons; you are pretty, young, bright, and popular. You have a knack of making friends. All the people about here and in the village would rather have *your* little finger than the rest of us put together. You walk straight into their hearts, my love, and therefore you are the most suitable member of this family to be despatched to India to ingratiate yourself with our rich relations."

"Your fine compliments are wasted, Jess—your 'butter' thrown away—for I am not going to India."

"No; and Fairy has ere this selected her steamer and travelling costume; if she has made up her mind to go, nothing will

stop her—and Uncle Pelham and Aunt Sally have never been told that Fairy is—is—so small. What *will* they say?" regarding her sister with awestruck eyes and a heightened colour.

What, indeed, would Mrs. Brande—who was already boasting of her niece from England, and loudly trumpeting the fame of the lovely girl she expected—say to Fairy? What would be her feelings when she was called upon to welcome a remarkably pretty little *dwarf?*

"It must be prevented," murmured Honor. "She cannot be allowed to go."

"Is Fairy ever prevented from doing what she wishes?" asked Jessie, with a solemn face.

To this pertinent question her sister could find no adequate reply. After a pause she rose and said—

"Let us go upstairs, and hear what she is saying to mother."

Mrs. Gordon was sitting up in bed with a flushed face and anxious expression,

listening to the brilliant description of Fairy's future career in India.

Fairy, with both elbows on the bed, and her pointed chin in her hands, was rapidly enumerating her new dresses, and wondering how soon they would be ready, declaring how fortunate it was that she had a quantity of patterns in the house, and that if her mother would only advance twenty pounds she could do wonders. She talked so incessantly, and so volubly, that no one had a chance of advising, objecting, or putting in one single word. Her mother and sisters listened in enforced, uneasy silence, to the torrent of this little creature's almost impassioned eloquence.

"It will take a fortnight to get ready," she said. "This is the fifteenth of March; what a scurry there will be! You two girls will have to sew your fingers to the bone—won't they, mother?"

Her mother faltered a feeble assent.

"I shall want at least twelve gowns and half a dozen hats. I must go into Hastings

to-morrow." She paused at last, with scarlet cheeks, and quite breathless.

"There is nearly a week before the mail goes out," ventured Jessie; "and it is rather too soon to decide yet. The letter only came an hour ago, and there is much to be considered, before mother can make up her mind as to which of us she can spare, and——"

"The whole thing is *quite* settled," interrupted Fairy in her sharpest key—Jessie was not her favourite sister—"only you are always so fond of interfering and managing every one, from mother down. Aunt Sara expressly asked for the pretty one; you saw it in black and white, and mother says I am to please myself—did you not, mother?" appealing to her parent, whose eyes sank guiltily before the reproachful gaze of her eldest daughter. Nevertheless she bravely sighed out—

"Yes, Fairy, I suppose so."

"There!" cried Fairy, triumphantly. "You see mother has decided, and I have

decided. I am not like some people, who take weeks to make up their minds, especially when moments are precious. I must write a quantity of letters for the early post. Honor, do you remember the name of Mrs. Travers' dressmaker? and do you think I should get a habit and riding-boots?"

CHAPTER VI.

"ROWENA"—FULL LIFE SIZE.

THE astonishing news that had come to Merry Meetings, was soon shared by the entire village, thanks to Susan's sister, who filled the post of messenger and charwoman. The letter was warmly discussed, in the sanded parlour of The Cause is Altered inn, over the counter at Hogben's the grocer, at the rectory, at Dr. Banks', and also by the Trevors—the family at the hall—a family to whom the Misses Gordon were indebted for most of their trivial gaieties. Opinion, whether in hall or tap-room, was for once unanimous. Of course one of the Gordons must accept her rich uncle's offer, and that without any foolish

or unnecessary delay. Although it was a wet afternoon, Cara and Sophy Trevor, Mrs. Banks, the rector, and Mrs. Kerry, arrived almost simultaneously at Merry Meetings, and half filled the drawing-room; which was of moderate size, with a southern aspect, and deep comfortable window-seats. The furniture was old-fashioned, and the carpet threadbare, but a few wicker chairs, a couple of Persian rugs, a quantity of pictures, books, flowers, and needlework, covered many deficiencies; it was the general sitting-room of the family, and if not always perfectly tidy, was at any rate delightfully home-like, vastly different to so many of its name-sakes, which have a fire on stated days; gaunt, formal apartments, solely devoted to visitors. Mrs. Gordon's friends dropped in at all hours, but chiefly at five o'clock, and the tea and hot cakes, dispensed at Merry Meetings, were considered unequalled in those parts.

Behold a selection of Mrs. Gordon's

nearest neighbours gathered eagerly round her hearth, whilst Honor made tea in thin, old shallow cups.

"We all met at the gate!" explained Cara Trevor, "and have come, as you see, to call on you in a body, to hear your news with our very own ears. Is it true, dear lady, that one of the girls is going out to India immediately?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Gordon. "I heard from my sister-in-law this morning, she and my brother are most anxious to have one of their nieces on a visit; they give us very short notice—only a fortnight. Honor, my love, Cara will take another cake."

"No, no, thank you," cried Miss Trevor, impatiently. "Pray do go on, and tell me all about this delightful invitation, Honor. Where is your uncle; in what part of India?"

"He is at Shirani, a hill station, most of the year. I believe he has rather a good appointment, something to do with the revenue."

"I know all about Shirani," answered Sophy Trevor, with an air of unusual importance. "We had a cousin quartered there once; it is a capital place for shooting, dancing, picnics, and tennis-parties—so different to this dead and alive Hoyle. It really ought to be spelt without the *y*. I wish some one would ask *me* to India. I would be ready to start to-night, with just a couple of basket-trunks and a dressing-bag. Which of you is going? I suppose you have not thought of it yet?" but she looked straight at Honor.

"Oh, it is quite settled," rejoined Fairy, in her clear shrill voice. "It was decided at once, as there is not a second to spare. You are to lose *me*," and she laughed affectedly. She had an extraordinarily loud laugh for such a little woman.

But there was no responding echo—no, not even a smile; on the contrary, an expression of blank consternation settled down on every countenance.

Mrs. Banks was the first to recover the

power of speech, as with a somewhat hysterical giggle, she remarked to the company the self-evident fact—

"I suppose the Indian mail came in to-day?"

"Yes," responded Jessie, adding significantly, "and goes out on Thursday, so we have not sent an answer to Uncle Pelham as yet."

"He does not know what is in store for him," murmured Mrs. Kerry to Mrs. Banks, as she rose and put her tea-cup on a table beside her. Meanwhile Fairy had produced a number of bundles of patterns of dress materials, and requested the two Miss Trevors to give an opinion of their merits. This created a merciful diversion. Most women enjoy turning over patterns, even patterns for mourning, and in desultory talk about dressmakers and chiffons, the visit came to a close.

"Did you ever hear such an utterly crazy notion?" cried Mrs. Banks, as soon as she and the two Miss Trevors were

outside the hall door. "I could scarcely believe my senses."

"And no wonder," said Sophy Trevor. "She should not be allowed to go; but she is so desperately obstinate, that if she has made up her mind to start, all England will not stop her."

"My husband shall stop her," returned Mrs. Banks, emphatically. "He shall put it on her health, and say that she is too delicate, and that the climate will kill her!"

"I doubt if even that would keep her at home," said Cara, who knew Fairy well. "How wretched Mrs. Gordon looked. Fairy is her idol, and turns her round her little finger, and I like Fairy the least of the family—she is so selfish and so vain. Poor Honor is her slave, and indeed they all give in to her far too much; but if they allow her to go out to India, they will never see a penny of their rich uncle's money. He is expecting a nice, comely, ordinary girl, not a little monster!"

"Oh, Cara!" protested her sister, in a deeply shocked voice.

"Well, you know she *is* a monster of selfishness and vanity," retorted Cara with unabashed persistence.

The Rev. James Kerry, who was trudging behind with his wife, displayed an unusually elongated upper lip—sure sign of excessive mental perturbation.

"Preposterous!" he exclaimed. "That child exercises a most baneful influence over her parent. I must see Mrs. Gordon alone, and reason her out of this insane project."

"And so you will, no doubt, in five minutes," assented his partner briskly, "and as soon as you have left, Fairy will reason her back again. Surely, my dear, you know Mrs. Gordon? The whole matter rests in Fairy's hands, and our only hope is that she may change her mind, or get the influenza, and there is but little chance of either."

It was now the turn of the Rev. James

to expostulate angrily with his companion.

* * * * *

The next three days were a period of unexampled misery to most of the inmates at Merry Meetings. Fairy was feverishly gay and feverishly busy. Though a severe cold kept her at home, she was never separated from her beloved patterns, no, not even when in bed. Most of her time was spent in writing to shops, making calculations in pencil, trimming hats, and searching through fashion-plates. She now had but two topics of conversation, India and dress. Meanwhile her mother and sisters looked on, powerless, and in a manner paralyzed by the sturdy will of this small autocrat. In these days there was considerable traffic to and fro from Merry Meetings, and an unusual amount of knocks and rings at Mrs. Gordon's modest little green hall door. The postman, instead of bringing one paper and a meagre envelope as of yore, now staggered under

a load of large brown-paper parcels, and an immense variety of card-board boxes. Telegrams were an every-day arrival, and letters poured in by the dozen. Fairy's preparations were advancing steadily, though her sisters whispered gravely to one another, that "she must not be allowed to go." Who was to prevent her? Not her mother, who sat in her usual armchair, looking harassed and woe-begone, and now and then heaved heartrending sighs and applied a damp pocket-handkerchief to her eyes.

Not the rector. He had reasoned with Fairy long and, as he believed, eloquently; but in vain. He pointed out her mother's grief, her great reluctance to part with her favourite child, her own uncertain health, but he spoke to deaf ears; and Dr. Banks, despite his wife's proud boast, fared but little better. He solemnly assured Fairy that she was not fit to go to India, to undertake the long journey alone; and, whatever her aunt might say, the climate

was only suited to people with robust constitutions. "Was she robust?" he demanded with asperity.

"He knew best," she retorted in her pertest manner. "One thing she did know, she was *going*. Her aunt had especially invited her, and why should she not have some amusement and see something of the world? instead of being buried alive at Hoyle. It was not living, it was mouldering."

"At any rate she would live longer at Hoyle than in India," the doctor angrily assured her. He was furious with this selfish, egotistical scrap of humanity, who had always secured the best of everything that fell to the lot of her impoverished family.

"As for amusement," he continued, "she would not find it very amusing to be laid up perhaps for weeks. She was a feverish subject, had she thought of the sicknesses that periodically scourged the East—cholera and small-pox?" Fairy, who was constitu-

tionally nervous, shuddered visibly. "Had she thought of long journeys on horse-back, she who shrieked if the donkey cocked his ears! She was, in his opinion, much too delicate and too helpless to think of leaving home."

Her determination was somewhat shaken by Dr. Banks' visit, and by a feverish cold; was it a foretaste of India already? But where filial duty and fear had failed to move her, vanity stepped in, and secured a complete surrender!

The spoiled child of the family was sitting alone in the drawing-room late one afternoon, sewing pleasant anticipations and serious misgivings, alternately, into a smart silk blouse, when her thoughts were suddenly scattered by a loud and unfamiliar double knock. She heard a man's voice in the hall, and had barely time to throw off her shawl, and give her hair a touch before the glass, when Susan announced, "Mr. Oscar Crabbe." He was a rising artist who had been staying in the neighbourhood at

Christmas, and had made no secret of his profound admiration for Miss Fairy Gordon, from a purely professional standpoint.

Oscar Crabbe was a good-looking man, with a pleasant voice, a luxuriant brown beard, and an off-hand, impetuous manner.

"Pray excuse my calling at this unceremonious hour," he said as he advanced with a cold, outstretched hand. "I believe it is long after five o'clock; but, as I was passing, I thought I would drop in on chance of finding some one at home. How are your mother and sisters?"

"My mother is lying down with a nervous headache; my sisters are shopping in Hastings, so you will have to put up with *me*," said Fairy, coquettishly.

"And you are the very person I most wish to see," returned Mr. Crabbe, drawing his chair closer as he spoke. "I want to ask you to do me a tremendous favour—I want to paint your portrait for next year's academy."

"My portrait?" she echoed tremulously.

"Yes; I said something to you at Christmas, you may remember."

"I thought you were joking."

"No, indeed! I was simply feeling my way; and, if you will honour me with a few sittings, I shall be deeply grateful. I propose to paint you as Rowena—full life size. You are an ideal Rowena."

"And when?"

"Oh, not for some months—not before autumn. But I always take time by the forelock; and as I was down here at the Trevors" (had Cara Trevor instigated this visit? History is silent, and the true facts will never be divulged) "I thought I would seize the opportunity of bespeaking a model for next season. I will only ask you to sit to me for the head and hands; the dress and figure I can work at in town. What do you say?"

"Oh, Mr. Crabbe," clasping her tiny hands rapturously, "I should have liked it beyond anything in the whole wide world. I am so sorry, but——"

"But your mother would not approve?"

"Not at all. She would be enchanted; but I am going to India immediately."

"To India?" he repeated, after an expressively long pause.

"Yes; my aunt and uncle have invited one of us—it was most unexpected—and I am going."

Mr. Crabbe looked grave; then he gave a sort of awkward laugh, and said—

"Well, Miss Gordon, I enroll myself among the number of friends who deeply deplore your departure. I am extremely sorry—indeed, I have a double reason for regret, for I shall never find such a Rowena!"

"And I am extremely sorry too. There will be no one in India who will want to paint my picture."

"I am not so sure of that. A young fellow, a friend of mine, went out there last October globe-trotting. He is the cleverest portrait painter I know, though he calls himself an amateur and only

paints for amusement, and in interludes of hunting and polo-playing. He has not to work for his daily bread, like the rest of us; but, if he had to do so, he would make his fortune if he studied and put his shoulder to the wheel. He has a genius for catching a true likeness, a natural attitude, a characteristic expression, and he does it all so easily and so quickly. A few rapid dashes, and the canvas seems to *live*. It is a pity he does not take to our profession seriously and study; but his uncle abhors 'painting chaps,' as he calls them; and his uncle, whose heir he is, is a millionaire."

"How nice! And what is the name of this fortunate young man?"

"Mark Jervis."

"I must try and remember. Perhaps I may come across him, and he may paint my picture; but it will be nothing in comparison to having it done by *you* and hung in the Royal Academy."

She turned her face upon her visitor with

an expression of dreamy ecstasy. A delicate colour, a brilliant sparkle in her eyes, the becoming background of a red lamp-shade, which set off her perfect profile, all combined to heighten the effect of Fairy's transcendent beauty; and Oscar Crabbe frankly assured himself that he was then and there gazing upon the face of the most lovely girl in England. As he gazed, he lost his head, and stammered out rapturously—

"Oh, if I could only paint you as you are now, my reputation would be assured; you would make me famous!"

"You mean that you would make *me* famous," she returned, dropping her eyes bashfully. "Do you know that you almost tempt me to abandon India and remain at home?"

"I wish you would. You are of far too delicate clay for the fierce tropical sun, and India plays the devil—I mean," picking himself up, "it is the grave of beauty. If anything should happen to prevent your

carrying out your trip, will you let me know without fail?"

"You may be certain that I shall."

"I wonder that one of your sisters——" he began, when the door opened and admitted the two ladies in question. They were cold, tired, longing for tea, and offered no serious resistance to Mr. Crabbe's immediate departure. He held Fairy's hand in his for several seconds, as if reluctant to release it, and he gave it a faint but distinctly perceptible pressure as he said, "I will not say, 'Bon voyage,' but, 'Au revoir.' Remember your promise," and hurried away.

It was noticed by her relations that Fairy was unusually silent all that evening. She seemed buried in thought, and her pretty white forehead was actually knit into wrinkles, as she stitched with deft and rapid fingers. To tell the truth, the young lady was carefully weighing the pros and cons respecting her Eastern trip. She lay awake for hours that night, revolving various questions in her busy little brain.

On one hand, she would escape from Hoyle and enjoy a gay and novel existence. She would be taken to balls and parties, and be the cynosure of all eyes; she would have plenty of pocket-money, plenty of pretty dresses, plenty of luxuries—that was one side of the shield. On the reverse, she mentally saw a hateful journey by sea, an unaccustomed life and climate, an ever-haunting dread of fever, cholera, snakes; she would probably have to accustom herself to riding wild ponies, to being borne along the brinks of frightful precipices; she would have no one to pet her and hunt up her things, and do her hair and mend her gloves—yes, she would miss Honor dreadfully. Mr. Crabbe had assured her that India was the grave of beauty. Supposing she became a fright! Dr. Banks had hinted at shattered health. No, after all, she would remain at home; her aunt and uncle would be in England in a year's time, she would pay them a nice long visit without risking either health or looks;

then there would be *Rowena*, a lasting and substantial triumph! She had visions of her picture hanging on the line in the Royal Academy, and guarded by police in order to keep the surging mob of admirers at bay, of crowds gazing spell-bound at her portrait, of notices in the society papers, of photographs in shop windows, of wide celebrity, and the acknowledgment of her beauty in the face of all England.

The prospect was intoxicating. Towards dawn she fell asleep, and enjoyed delightful dreams.

The next morning, ere descending to breakfast, she called her sisters into her room, and said, in an unusually formal manner—

"Jessie and Honor, I may as well tell you that I have changed my mind, and given up all idea of going to India, so I thought you ought to know at once."

"I am delighted to hear it," replied Jessie, with unaffected relief. "But why?" surveying her with questioning eyes.

"Why have you so suddenly altered your plans?"

"I have been lying awake all night, thinking of mother," was the mendacious reply. "I see she is fretting dreadfully; it would break her heart to part with me, and I shall never leave her, or at least," correcting herself, "never leave England."

"It is unfortunate that you did not think of mother a little sooner!" said Jessie, glancing round the room, which was blocked up with boxes and parcels containing purchases in the shape of hats and shoes and jackets, and many articles "on approval." "I think you are very wise to stay at home; but it is a pity that you have made such great preparations. Is it not, Honor?"

"No doubt *you* think so," retorted Fairy, sarcastically. "Of course it seems a pity that none of my pretty new things will fit either of *you*."

CHAPTER VII.

FAIRY RELENTS.

Now that, to every one's intense relief, Fairy had changed her mind and withdrawn her claim, the question remained, Who was to go? Public opinion, her mother, Jessie—in short, every voice save one, said Honor. But Honor was indisposed to visit the East. She was not an enterprising young woman, and she was fond of home; and Fairy, when alone with her, shed showers of crocodile tears every time the subject was mentioned. She could not bear to part with her favourite sister; no, it was too cruel of people to suggest such a thing. Who, she asked herself, would dress her hair, and button

her boots, and read her to sleep? And many of Honor's hateful tasks would fall to her, such as arranging the flowers, dusting the drawing-room, housekeeping, going messages, for Jessie's time meant money, and must be respected. Aloud, in the family circle, she said in authoritative tones, "Let Jessie go! As to looks, *any* looks are good enough for India; even Jessie will seem handsome there. After all, why should any of them accept the invitation? England was a free country. She (Fairy) would send a nice, grateful little letter, and keep the cheque. Uncle Pelham would never be so mean as to take it back, and they would buy a pony instead of that maddening donkey, and make a tennis-ground, and take a fortnight's trip to London, and enjoy themselves for once in their lives."

A week elapsed. The mail had gone out without an answer to Mr. Brande. Jessie and her mother had both talked seriously to Honor, and she had listened with her

pleasantest smile, whilst they pointed out the advantages she would personally reap from her Eastern trip. She made no attempt to argue the point, only asked in a playful way who was to drive the donkey? Who was to play the harmonium in church? for she flattered herself that she was the only person in the parish who could do either. And there was the garden and the poultry—the hens would be lost without her!"

"We shall *all* be lost without you," rejoined Jessie; "but we can spare you for your own good."

"I don't want to be spared for my own good," she answered. "I prefer staying at home. You think that I shall carry all before me out there! You are greatly mistaken. All your geese are swans. *I* am a goose, and not a swan. I am just a country cousin, with a bad complexion and uncouth manners."

"Honor! you have a beautiful skin, only not much colour; and as for your

manners, they are as good as other people's."

"You have often said that mine are alarmingly abrupt, and that I have the habits of a savage or a child in the way I blurt out home-truths."

"Oh, but only at home; and you must not *always* mind what I say."

"Then what about the present moment? When you say that I ought to go out to Uncle Pelham—how am I to know that I ought to mind what you say now?"

"Upon my word, Honor, you are really too provoking!"

Little did Mrs. Gordon and her friends suspect how their weighty reasons and arguments were nullified by Fairy, who nightly, with arms wound tightly round her sister's neck, and face pressed to hers, whispered, "You won't go; promise me, you won't go."

Jessie, the clear-sighted, at last began to suspect that Fairy was at the bottom of her sister's reluctance to acquiesce. Fairy

was so demonstratively affectionate to Honor. This was unusual. It was too bad, that Fairy should rule her family, and that her wishes should be law. Jessie conferred with her mother, and they agreed to try another plan. They would drop the subject, and see if feminine contrariness would be their good friend? The word "India" was therefore not uttered for three whole precious days; patterns and passages, etc., were no longer discussed, matters fell back into their old monotonous groove, save that Mrs. Gordon frequently gazed at her youngest daughter, and heaved unusually long and significant sighs.

One afternoon, ten days after the letter had been received which still lay unanswered in Mrs Gordon's desk, Honor met the rector as she was returning from practising Sunday hymns on the wheezy old harmonium.

"This will be one of your last practices," he said. "I am sure I don't know *how* we are to replace you."

"Why should you replace me?" she asked. "I am not going away."

"Not going away," he repeated. "I understood that it was all settled. Why have you changed your mind?"

"I never made up my mind to go."

"Why not? Think of all the advantages you will gain."

"Yes, advantages; that is what Jessie is always drumming into my head. I shall see the world, I shall have pretty dresses, and a pony, and plenty of balls and parties, and new friends."

"And surely you would enjoy all these —you are only nineteen, Honor?"

"Yes, but these delights are for myself; there is nothing for *them*," nodding towards "Merry Meetings." "I am the only person who will benefit by this visit, and I am sure I am more wanted at home than out in India. Jessie cannot do everything, her writing takes up her time; and I look after the house and garden. And then there is Fairy; she cannot bear me to leave her."

"You have spoiled Fairy among you," cried the rector, irritably. "Only the other day she was crazy to go to India *herself*. She must learn to give up, like other people. It is very wrong to sacrifice yourself to the whims and fancies of your sister; in the long run they will become a yoke of dreadful bondage. Remember that you are not a puppet, nor an idiot, but a free, rational agent."

"Yes," assented the girl. She knew she was now in for one of Mr. Kerry's personal lectures. It might be over in two or three minutes, and it might continue for half an hour.

"Now listen to me, Honor. I know you are a good, honest young woman, and think this plan will only benefit yourself. You are wrong. Your mother is in poor health; her pension dies with her. If you offend your only near relative, how are you to exist?"

"I suppose we can work. Every woman ought to be able to earn her bread—even if it is without butter."

"Honor, I did not know that you held these emancipated views. I hope you won't let any other man hear you airing them. As for work! Can Fairy work? Jessie, I know, can earn a few pounds, but she could barely keep herself; and if you fall sick, what will you do? It is best to survey matters from every standpoint. Your aunt and uncle have practically offered to adopt you. You will return in a year's time; you will have made many friends for yourself and sisters, developed your own at present limited views of the world, and bring many new interests into your life. Your absence from home will be a considerable saving. Have you thought of that?"

"A saving!" she echoed incredulously.

"Of course! Don't you eat? A healthy girl like you cannot live on air; and there is your dress."

"I make my own dresses."

"Nonsense!" with an impatient whirl of his stick. "You don't make the material. How can you be so stubborn, so wilfully

blind to your own interests. If another girl had your chances, Honor Gordon would be the very first to urge her to go; and that in her most knock-me-down style. You have a much keener view where other people's affairs are concerned than your own."

"Of course, it is only for a year," said Honor. "I shall be back among you all within twelve months."

"Yes, if you are not married," added the rector, rashly.

"It appears to be the general impression in Hoyle, that going to India means going to be married," said the girl, firing up and looking quite fierce. "Please put that idea quite at one side, as far as *I* am concerned."

"Very well, my dear, I will," was the unexpectedly meek response.

Touched by his humility, she continued, "Then you really think I *ought* to go?"

"My good child, there can be no two opinions. Every one thinks you ought to go."

"Except Fairy."

"Fairy has no right to stand in your way, and your absence will be an excellent lesson for her. She will learn to be independent and useful. Now, here is my turn, and I must leave you. Go straight home and tell them that you are ready to start, and that the sooner your mother sees about your escort and passage the better."

And he wrung her hand and left her. Honor walked home at a snail's pace, thinking hard. If Fairy would but give her consent, she would hold out no longer against every one's wishes. She would go—yes, without further hesitation. After all, it was only for one year. But, although she did not know it, Fairy had already yielded. Jessie and Mrs. Banks had been talking to her seriously in Honor's absence, and she had been persuaded to listen to the voice of reason—and interest.

If she had gone to India, as she intended, she would have been parted from Honor, and of her own accord.

This fact, brusquely placed before her by Mrs. Banks, she was unable to deny, and sat dumb and sullen.

"Uncle Pelham is sure to take to Honor," added Jessie, "and he will probably do something for us all, thinking that we are *all* as nice as Honor, which is not the case. She will be home in a year, and there will be her letter every week."

"Yes, and *presents*," put in Mrs. Banks, significantly. "She will have plenty of pocket-money, and will be able to send you home no end of nice things."

Fairy sniffed and sighed, dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief, and finally suffered herself to be coaxed and convinced, and when her sister opened the drawing-room door, with rather a solemn face, she ran to her and put her arms round her and said—

"Honor, darling, I have promised to let you go!"

That very day the important epistle was despatched to Shirani, and Fairy, to show that she did nothing by halves, actually

dropped it into the letter-box with her own hand. And during the evening she once more produced the bundles of patterns, and threw herself heart and soul into the selection of her sister's outfit.

CHAPTER VIII.

DANIEL POLLITT, ESQ., AND FAMILY.

The grand dinner-party at 500, Princes Gate, was over, the last silken train had swept down the steps, the last brougham had bowled away, and a somewhat bored-looking young man indulged in a stretch and a prodigious yawn, and strolled slowly back to the library, where the master of the house, a spruce little person of sixty, with a rosy cheek and active eye, stood before the empty fireplace (the month was June) with his coat-tails under his arms, engaged in chewing a tooth-pick. Wealthy he may be, judging from his surroundings, but he is certainly not distinguished in appearance; his scanty locks are brushed out into two

sharp horns over his large ears. In spite of his blazing solitaire stud and faultless claw-hammer coat, he is plebeian; yes, from the points of his patent leather shoes to the crown of his bald head. It is difficult to believe that he is the uncle of the aristocratic young fellow who has just entered and cast himself into a deep armchair. What the French call "the look of race," is the principal thing that strikes one about Mark Jervis. It is afterwards—possibly some time afterwards—that you realize the fact that he is remarkably handsome, and considerably older than you took him to be at the first glance. His smooth face and sunny hazel eyes are misleading: young Jervis is more than nineteen, he is five and twenty.

"Well, Mark, that's over, thank God," exclaimed Mr. Pollitt. "I hate these big dinners; but your aunt will have them. She says we owe them; women are never backward in paying *those* sort of debts. It was well done, hey? That new *chef* is a

success. Did you taste the Perdreaux aux Chartreuse—or the Bouchée à la financière, or that cold *entrée?*"

"No, Uncle Dan," strangling another great yawn.

"Ah, you sly dog! You were too much taken up with Lady Boadicea! She is considered a beauty—at least her picture made rather a stir. What do you think? How does she strike *you?*"

"To me—she looks like a wax doll that has been held too close to the fire—and she is about as animated."

"Well, you can't say that of the American girl, Miss Clapper—there's a complexion! —there's animation!—there's a stunner for you!"

"A stunner, indeed! She thrust her money down my throat in such enormous quantities that I could scarcely swallow anything else!"

"Then why the deuce did you not stuff some of *mine* down hers, hey?" chuckling. "I saw you at Hurlingham this afternoon."

"Did you, sir? I had no idea you were there."

"It was a frightful squash—hardly a chair to be had; the Royalties, a fine day and a popular match, brought 'em. I suppose that was the new pony you were trying, brown with white legs. How do you like him?"

"He is not handy, and he is a bit slow. He is not in the same class with Pipe-clay, or the chestnut Arab; I don't think we will buy him, sir."

"Lord Greenleg was very anxious to hear what I thought of him. He only wants a hundred and thirty—asked me to give him an answer there and then, as he had another customer, but I thought I had better wait till I heard your opinion. Is the pony worth one hundred and thirty guineas? What do you say?"

"I say, cut off the first figure, and that is about his value," rejoined his nephew shortly.

Mr. Pollitt looked blank. He rather

liked buying ponies from lords, even at a high figure, but a hundred guineas too much was a stiff sum. He knew that he could rely on the young fellow's opinion, for lazy as he seemed, lounging there in an easy chair, he could both buy a horse and ride a horse—which does not always follow. The languid-looking youth was a hard rider to hounds, and a finished polo player.

"Then I suppose we shan't mind the brown, eh, Mark?" said his uncle rather dolefully. "After all, it is getting late in the season, and his lordship has another offer."

"*Has* he!" expressively. "Oh, then, that is all right."

"Your side played up well to-day, my boy!"

"And were well beaten—two goals to four. Johnny Brind is no good as a back. He sits doubled up in his saddle, like an angry cat, and lets the ball roll out between his pony's fore legs—and his language!"

"That did not come as far as my ears. I saw you speaking to Lord Robert Tedcastle.

You were at Eton with him—you might bring him home to lunch some Sunday; and that Italian prince, did you come across him?" anxiously.

"No; I did not see him."

"I noticed you having a long talk with that young Torrens; what was he yarning about? He was nodding his head and waving his hands like a cheap toy."

"He was telling me of his plans. He and his brother are off to America next week, they are going on to Japan, Australia, and India. I say, Uncle Dan," suddenly sitting erect, "I wish you would let *me* travel for a couple of years and see the world."

A silence of nearly a minute, and then Mr. Pollitt burst out—

"Now, this is some stuff that young ass Torrens has been putting into your head. To see the world! What world? You see it at home. England is the world. You have the best of everything here—the handsomest women, finest horses, best food

and drink, best——" he paused, and his nephew, who was nursing his leg, blandly suggested "climate."

"Climate be hanged! best society," bawled Mr. Pollitt. "The fact of the matter is, you young chaps don't know when you are well off. Travel—see the world—skittles!"

"I know that I am exceedingly well off, thanks to you, Uncle Dan," rejoined his nephew, quietly. "I have capital polo ponies, a first-rate stud of hunters, a splendid allowance—but a fellow can't play polo, and hunt, and go to balls and theatres all his life; at least, that's not *my* idea of life. I have nothing to do, no profession, you know; you would not hear of my going into the service."

"No—I hate the army—what prospect does it offer the young idiots who are slaving to get into it—to live vagabonds, and die beggars!"

"There was the diplomatic corps; but I've not brains enough for that."

"Bosh! You don't want a profession, taking bread out of other people's mouths. You are my heir—*that's* your profession. As to intellect, there is a great deal too much intellect in these days; the world would be far easier to govern if there was less! You have brains enough, my boy, you did very well at Oxford."

"I know that I am very fortunate," repeated the young man, "and that thousands of fellows would give anything to stand in my shoes."

"Clarence for one," interrupted his uncle, with a loud chuckle.

"But I'm sick of the eternal treadmill round of the London season—Ascot, Goodwood, Cowes, Scotland. Then back to London, and we begin the whole business over again. We see the same people, and do the same things."

"How old are you, Mark?" broke in Mr. Pollitt, excitedly.

"Five and twenty."

"One would think you were eighty-five!

But it is all the rage to be bored and *blasé*, and to give out that life is not worth living. You are in the height of the fashion, my boy! The fact of the matter is—that you are too prosperous. A blow of real trouble, cutting to the very bone, would do you no harm."

"Perhaps so. Properly speaking, I believe I ought to have been a poor man's son, and had to work my way. I feel that I could do it. I would not have minded being a soldier, a sailor, an explorer, or even a stock-rider."

"In fact, to put the matter in a nutshell, anything but what you *are*."

"Well, Uncle Dan, you have fought your way up to the front, step by step, and won your spurs, and enjoyed the battle. I should like to take some weapon, and strike into the fray." Here he suddenly got up, and came over to his uncle, and, putting his hand affectionately on his shoulder said, "I would like to do something to make you"—with a nervous laugh—"proud of

me;" and as he looked into his uncle's shrewd little face, his eyes shone with repressed excitement.

"I'm proud enough. You are my own flesh and blood—a good-looking chap, a capital rider, and a gentleman; a bit too fond of dabbling with your nasty, dirty oil paints, a bit dreamy and Quixotic, but——"

At this juncture the door was gently pushed open, and a long, hooked nose came slowly into the room, followed by a tall, thin, elderly lady, attired in a clinging mist-coloured robe, and blazing with diamonds. A sallow, discontented-looking person, with a high-bred air, despite her touzled fringe.

"So you are *both* here!" she murmured sweetly.

"Yes," assented Mr. Pollitt; "and here is Mark," waving a short square hand towards him. "What do you think is his last craze, Selina? He wants to travel for a couple of years, in order to see the world. Just like the hero of a fairy tale."

Mark hastened to place a chair for his

aunt, into which she gently sank, keeping her eyes steadily fixed on his as she did so, and gradually narrowing her gaze to a cat-like glint.

"Do you know that I rather *like* the idea!" she remarked, after a momentary silence. "I think it is a shocking thing for a young man to waste his life, lounging in clubs gossipping and gambling, or playing a game on the back of a pony. Travelling improves the mind and enlarges the ideas." Here, catching sight of Mr. Pollitt's face of angry scorn, she lost no time in adding, "You know, it is all the fashion to travel, it's only the second-rate people and nobodies who stay at home. Lady Grace and Lord Kenneth are going out to India this cold weather, so is the Duke of Saltminster, the Marquis and Marchioness of Tordale, and crowds of other smart people."

Smart people were to Mr. Pollitt, as his crafty wife knew, the very salt of the earth; and his expression changed from that of repressed fury to grave attention.

"India! Perhaps I would not mind so much," he admitted, after a pause. "The boy was born there, and he could look up his father. Yes, and he might have some shooting, and pick up a few tigers, and nice acquaintances and companions."

"Oh, but, of course, Mark could not travel alone, dear. He must have a pleasant and experienced——"

"Bear-leader or keeper; or what would you say to a chaperon?" broke in her husband.

"My dearest!" she gravely expostulated. "You know perfectly well that it would be frightfully dull for the poor boy roaming about the country with no one to keep him company, not knowing where to go, or what to say. Now Clarence," and she hesitated.

"Yes — now Clarence. What now?" sharply.

"Clarence," speaking very distinctly, "was stationed in India for eight years. He is an experienced Anglo-Indian, has hundreds of friends, talks Hindostani fluently,

and could get no end of shooting and introductions to native *princes*" (great emphasis on princes). "He would be a capital guide for Mark."

"Umph!" with a short laugh. "I'm not so sure of that, Mrs. Pollitt."

"Oh, my dear Dan, he is perfectly steady now. Why, he is thirty-five, and has sown his wild oats. I never quite believe in these wonderfully good young men," and she shot a swift glance at Mark. "Except Mark, of course, and he ought to have been a parson, and," with a little sneer, "he may yet become a missionary."

"But India is no novelty to Clarence," protested Mr. Pollitt; "and, by all accounts, he made it too hot to hold him. Mark can easily tack himself on to some party of friends, and do the tour with them. You say that the Rothmores——"

"Oh yes," impatiently; "and they have made their arrangements months ago. Mark cannot tack himself on to people, as you express it; it would not do at all. On

the contrary, he must have some one tacked on to *him*. The trip will be a boon to my brother, as well as to your nephew. Poor Clarence loves India. He is frightfully hard up; he would be an ideal companion for Mark," turning to him. "What do you say, Mark? Answer us quite frankly."

And under these circumstances what could Mark say but, "Yes; oh, certainly. Clarence is a good sort."

"And at any rate, *he* can well be spared from home," added Mr. Pollitt, dryly.

"Then you will consent to Mark's request, darling?" said his wife, rising and tapping him playfully with her big feather fan. "Think of all he will have to tell you, and of all the pretty things he will bring us."

"As long as he does not bring a *wife!*" growled the old gentleman. "Well, well, well, it is not often that you and Mark are on the same side in a debate, or that you second the resolution. When you combine, you are too strong for me. I'll think it over."

Mrs. Pollitt gave her nephew by marriage

a quick significant glance, for this speech distinctly showed that the bill before the (head of the) house had passed, and that it now only remained to go into a committee of ways and means.

CHAPTER IX.

PERMISSION TO TRAVEL.

Mark Jervis had been agreeably surprised by his aunt's enthusiastic co-operation; thanks to her powerful alliance, he had carried his point, and was to spend twelve months travelling in India, accompanied by Mrs. Pollitt's brother, Captain Clarence Waring. The latter was about to revisit his former haunts in an entirely new character—that of mentor and companion to a young man—and, moreover, a wealthy young man. All the world has heard of "Pollitt's Pearl Barley," and "Pollitt's Patent Fowls' Food." Are not its merits blazoned in flaming letters in railway stations, in fields bordering the rocking

expresses that thunder through the land? Does not the name of "Pollitt" greet the miserable eyes of sea-sick travellers, as they stagger down the companion ladders of ocean greyhounds? In short, the enterprise of Daniel Pollitt, and the fame of Pollitt's pearl barley, is of universal renown.

Although he has never boasted of the fact, or assured his intimates that "he began life with the traditional sixpence," Mr. Pollitt is a self-made man. He talks freely enough of his wife's relations, of his nephew's famous pedigree, but he has not once alluded in the most distant fashion to his own little family tree. Yet he has nothing to be ashamed of. His father was a gentleman by birth, a poor curate, who had left two almost penniless orphans, Dan and a sister, several years younger than himself. The former, while yet in his early teens, had clambered on to a stool in an office in the city, from thence (unusual flight) he had soared to success and wealth. Thanks to indomitable industry, shrewdness, and

pluck, he was now a merchant of credit and renown. The latter, who was a remarkably pretty and well-educated girl, accompanied a lady to India, in the capacity of governess, and, in a startlingly short time, married Captain Jervis of the Bengal Cavalry, a good-looking popular officer, with a long pedigree and a somewhat slender purse. By all accounts, the marriage was a happy one. At the end of six years Mrs. Jervis died, and their only child, a boy of five, was sent to school in England. Five years later, he was followed by his father, who rushed home on three months' leave, in order to see little Mark as well as his tailor and his dentist. Major Jervis, a bronzed, handsome, distinguished soldier, made an excellent impression on the plodding city man — his brother-in-law, who cordially invited him to stay with him at Norwood, where he had a luxurious bachelor establishment. And here, over unimpeachable claret and cigars, the Indian officer unfolded his plans.

Little Mark was about to have a step-mother, the lady was a Miss Cardozo, of Portuguese extraction, dark, handsome, not very young, but enormously wealthy, and quite infatuated about little Mark's papa. Her grandfather had been a military adventurer, whose sword and swagger had gained him the heart and treasures of a Begum. Miss Cardozo's father was an indigo planter, in those good old times when indigo crops brought in lacs of rupees, and she was his sole heiress and an orphan. Besides the Begum's wealth and jewels, she owned property in the Doon, property in the hills, property in Tirhoot, shares in banks and railways, and large investments in the funds.

Mr. Pollitt's shrewd little eyes glistened approvingly as he absorbed these particulars.

"Cut the service, bring her to England, and take a fine country place," was his prompt suggestion.

"No, no, she hates England; she was at school over here. She dreads our winters, and rain and fog," replied Major Jervis.

"And she likes my being in the service. I can tell you that our men and horses are something to see! Mércèdes—that is her name—delights in pomp and show and glitter, and is much attached to India; and to tell you the honest truth, Pollitt, I'm partial to the country too. I have been out there twenty-two years, ever since I was eighteen, with only two short furloughs, and it's a country that suits me down to the ground. My near relations in England are every one dead, I have no ties here, all my friends and interests are out there, and I don't mind if I end my days in the East."

"And what about Mark?" demanded his listener.

"Yes, that is the question," said his father. "It's hard lines on the boy, to have no home with me—but later on he shall go into the service, and come out to us. You have been wonderfully kind to him I know, having him here in his holidays, and he is very fond of you, as he ought to

be. I feel rather guilty about him, poor chap; he is ten years old and I have seen nothing of him for half that time, and now, goodness knows how or where we may meet again. Of course no money shall be spared on his education, and all that—but——" he paused.

"But *I'll* tell you what you will do," continued Mr. Pollitt. "I'll put the whole matter in a nutshell. You are making a fresh start, you and the boy are almost strangers, so you won't feel the wrench. Give him to *me*, I am fond of him, I have no family—he is a handsome, plucky little fellow, with poor Lucy's eyes—I will ensure him a first-class education, bring him up as my son, and make him my heir, and leave him all I am worth; come now?"

"It is a splendid offer, Pollitt, but *I* am fond of him too. I cannot provide for him as you would, I can only set him out in the world with a profession, and make him a small allowance, for of course Mércèdes' money will be settled on herself. If I

resigned him to you, in years to come I might repent, I might want him back."

"In years to come you will probably have half a dozen other sons, and be thankful to have one of them off your hands."

After considerable discussion—Jervis, the father, a little reluctant; Pollitt, the uncle, exceedingly eager and pressing—the matter was concluded. Mark was to correspond with his parent as regularly as he pleased, but he was to be, to all intents and purposes, his uncle Daniel's son.

Major Jervis made the most of his five weeks in England. He invested in new and gorgeous uniform, a new battery of guns, saddlery, presents for Indian friends and his *fiancée*, and saw as much as possible of Mark. The more the pair were acquainted the better they liked each other. They went to the Tower, Madame Tussaud's, the Zoo, the theatres. Mark invariably accompanied his parent to tailors, boot-makers and gun-smiths, and became subsequently quite the authority on these matters at

school. His soldierly, open-handed sire, who loaded him with gifts, who told him tales of the stirring deeds of his ancestors, of his own swarthy sowars, of tiger-hunting and elephant drives, speedily became his hero and his idol.

On being sounded as to his own choice of a profession, Mark, after taking thought for a considerable time, gravely announced to his father and uncle, "that he would prefer to be a bachelor."

"And by no means a bad choice," roared Mr. Pollitt, in great glee. "Stick to that, my boy, stick to that, copy your old uncle."

"I don't think he will," remarked Major Jervis, with decision; "he will take after me. We are a susceptible race, we Jervises, and I'll give him till he is two and twenty."

The day of parting was a dismal one for father and son. The child struggled desperately to be a man, to shed no tears, and bore himself wonderfully, at any rate in public, but after the cab had driven off, he

rushed away and shut himself up in his own little bedroom, and flung himself upon the floor, and abandoned himself to the bitterest grief he had ever experienced, and he was ten years old.

Some years after this scene, Mr. Pollitt, to every one's surprise, married a faded, elegant-looking woman, of good family, but portionless. He bought a house in Princes Gate, rented a grouse moor, deer forest, and hunting box, and invested in some celebrated diamonds. He had now amassed a great fortune, and at the age of fifty-five, retired from business, in order to spend it. But here arose an unexpected difficulty, he did not know how to enjoy the result of his labours, save by proxy. He looked up to his handsome well-born nephew to manipulate his thousands, much as a child appeals to an experienced friend to work a new mechanical toy. All his own youth had been spent among great city warehouses, on wharves, and in offices. He had never ridden, save on the top of an omnibus, he

could not drive, shoot, row, or even fish, and, alas! it was now too late to learn. He, however, took to field sports in the character of a spectator, with surprising enthusiasm. He walked with the guns on his moors, and was much excited respecting the bag. He gave fancy prices for his nephew's hunters, and attended every meet (on wheels), where there was a prospect of seeing their performance, following the line, and keeping the hounds in sight as far as possible, by means of short cuts and glasses.

He was a truly proud man when he saw his nephew's name in the *Field* as foremost rider in a sensational run. The worst of it was, that Mark hated notoriety of any kind, hung back where he should come forward, came forward when he should have hung back; had actually no desire to lease a theatre, keep race-horses, or even gamble; in short, he had not a single extravagant taste. (Here, indeed, was a most singular case. How many fathers are there in these latter days who feel hurt and disappointed

because their sons will not spend thousands?) On the other hand, Mrs. Pollitt was only too ready to assist her partner in laying out large sums. She had many needy connections, and hoped to do great things for them; but she found, to her deep chagrin, that the personal spending of her husband's wealth was denied her. She had a liberal dress allowance, diamonds of the first water, equipages, a fine establishment, a French maid; but she might not thrust her hand into her lord and master's purse and scatter largesse to her poor relations, and—what was a truly hard case—she might not even attempt to arrange an alliance between Mark and one of her nieces. No, Mr. Pollitt was resolved that his heir should marry *rank*. It must be "Mr. and Lady Somebody Jervis," and with Mark's good looks, money, and birth, there would be no difficulty in this little matter. Then Mark must go into Parliament, settle down as a great landed proprietor, and ruffle it with the best. Thus was his future sketched

out by his uncle, who wisely kept the sketch to himself.

Mrs. Pollitt was surprised to find her dear Daniel so obstinate and impracticable on several trifling matters. For instance, she had made up her mind to change the spelling of his name, and had even gone so far as to have her own cards printed, "Mrs. D. Murray-Paulet, 500, Princes Gate."

"How lucky that Daniel has a second name!" she said to herself as she complacently examined her new title a few days after her marriage. She tripped across the room and held a card playfully before the bridegroom's spectacles, and the tiresome man had exclaimed—

"Who is she? I can't stand visitors. Here, let me clear out first, if she is coming up——"

"The new card trick," as he subsequently called it, had been their first trial of strength, and the bride had succumbed with tears.

"Change his name!" he had roared—

"his name, that he had made! Never! He was proud of it. It was the wife who changed her name on marriage, not the husband. Was she aware of that?"

Another subject on which she had had to yield was the housekeeping bills; they all passed through Mr. Pollitt's hands, who settled them by cheque, consequently there were no pickings.

Mrs. Pollitt had her own particular schemes; she could not offer her kinsfolk much solid assistance, but did what she could. To her sister and nieces she distributed dresses and mantles scarcely worn; she gave them drives, boxes at the theatre, tickets, and perpetual invitations to dinner, lunch, and all her parties; to her brother Clarence such sums as she could spare from her pin-money. Clarence was ten years her junior, gay, *débonnaire*, and good-looking. He had a pair of handsome, insolent blue eyes, a well-cultivated moustache, an admirable figure, and a rather overbearing manner. He was a

complete man of the world, who had many pecuniary troubles, no fixed principles, and but few scruples. He was, nevertheless, pleasant, and by no means unpopular.

Captain Waring had spent every penny that he possessed (and a good many pennies belonging to other people); and when his regiment came home from India, he had been compelled to retire from the service, and had been living ever since on his friends and his wits. This Indian trip would be a capital thing for him, all expenses paid; and if he and Mark remained away a year, some of the other connections might get a footing at Princes Gate. The aphorism, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," does not apply to uncles and nephews.

If Mark were *never* to return, it would not break his aunt's heart. If he had not been her husband's favourite, she might have been fond of him. He was exceedingly presentable; she liked to exhibit him in her carriage or opera-box (a gratification

she seldom enjoyed). He was always polite, always thoughtful of her comfort, always respectful, though he had shown himself ready with a forcible reply on one or two critical occasions; but he did not understand the art of administering flattery, and she consumed it in large doses. Now here Clarence was supreme; it was *he* who had solemnly assured her that she bore a striking resemblance to Sara Bernhardt. Yes, golden voice and all; and the poor deluded lady believed him, and attired herself in clinging draperies, and combed her fringe well over her brows in order to emphasize her undeniable resemblance to the great actress. Once, when she questioned Mr. Pollitt on the subject, he had laughed so uproariously—so like a husband—that an apoplectic seizure seemed imminent.

Captain Waring was most enthusiastic respecting this Indian scheme, and naturally gave the project his warmest support. *Tête-à-tête*, he said, "It's a first-class notion of Mark's. The uncle keeps him far

too tight in hand. No wonder he wants to break away and see the world and live his own life, poor devil!"

"What nonsense!" protested Mrs. Pollitt, irritably. "He has plenty of liberty and a latch-key."

"And does not know how to use one or other. Besides, the uncle's proud eye is always on him; he follows him about like a dog—worse, for dogs are not admitted into clubs! However, this twelve months' holiday in a far country will be a most blessed relief to the boy and A 1 business for me. I'm on my last legs; and if this had not turned up, I'd have had to make strong running with Miss Clodde. She is common and repulsive looking, but has thirty thousand pounds. I hope I may never be so *desperate* as to marry her—at any rate, I have a year's respite."

"How do you know she would have you, Clar?"

Clar's laugh was an interesting study in manly assurance.

"I really wish you *were* married," continued his sister rather peevishly.

"Yes; to a rich elderly widow who has had her fling—that is my style."

"What a horrible way of talking! You are really too dreadful. I suppose this trip will be rather costly?"

"Ra—*ther!*" emphatically.

"And you will be the treasurer?" opening her pale eyes to their widest extent.

"I'm not so sure of that," shaking his head. "Of course, as I am the manager, and am personally conducting this tour, all payments ought to come from *me*. 'The uncle,' however, is rather shy of having monetary dealings with his brother-in-law, as you know by sad experience. However, I may be able to work it, once we are in India, and you may depend upon me for making the most of my time and—opportunities. I was so hard up, I was thinking of taking a leaf out of Charlie Wilde's book. He writes hymns and tracts——"

"How absurd you are! What prepos-

terous nonsense! Charlie Wilde, who has never entered a place of worship for years, write tracts!"

"I tell you that he does!" persisted Clarence. "He has a wonderful knack, and does the pathetic and emotional style A 1. Gets about ten pounds apiece, and invests the money in a flutter on the turf."

"Well, Clar," said his deeply shocked sister, "I cannot compliment you on your companions; and, whatever you may come to, I hope you will never arrive at such a pitch of wickedness as that."

On one point Captain Waring and Mr. Pollitt were most warmly agreed, viz. that "the trip must be done in good style if done at all."

Mark was inclined to travel "on the cheap," his uncle had complained, and had protested against a large quantity of baggage, a battery of guns, and a valet.

"Thirty pair of boots!" he cried. "What rubbish! I am not going to *walk* round India!"

"But Clarence says you can't do with less, and he must know better than you do," argued Mr. Pollitt. "I wish you to travel like a gentleman, not like a bag-man. There is where you disappoint me, my boy—you make no show, no dash; your tastes are all for quiet—your favourite character is the violet, and you prefer a back seat. You are going out in the same steamer with a lot of nobs—I've seen to that—and it is as likely as not that you will join forces when you land. These swells take to you. As for me, they only take to my dinners, and my deer forest. However, as long as *you* are in the best set, I don't care—I'm satisfied."

"I think Clarence and I will stick to ourselves, and not join any party, sir; we will be more independent. He has sketched out our beat—Bombay, Poonah, Secunderabad, Travancore, Madras, Ceylon, Calcutta, the hills; and that puts me in mind to ask if you have any idea of my father's whereabouts?"

"Bostock and Bell, Bombay, are his agents," evading the question and his nephew's eyes.

"I know that; I have written to their care steadily for the last six years."

"And never had an answer?" with ill-concealed satisfaction.

"No, except a 'Pioneer' at long, long intervals."

"Just to show that he is alive? Let me see, it is eight years since he left the service and went to live at a place called the Doon. He wrote pretty regularly up to then; and when Mrs. Jervis was killed in that carriage accident, he never sent a line, only a paper. Poor woman! I believe she led him a devil of a life. She was insanely jealous."

"I suppose I can get his address in Bombay—his real address, I mean?"

"Yes, I should think so."

"And then I shall look him up — at once."

"If he will be looked up. The Jervises

are an eccentric family. I heard some queer stories of them not long ago."

"But my father never struck you as eccentric, did he?"

"No. And, of course, you must try and see him; but don't let him lay hands on you and *keep* you, my boy. He was a handsome, persuasive sort of fellow, and had wonderful personal charm—when he chose to exert it. India has cast a spell upon him, and kept him with her for the best part of his life. Don't let India do the same by *you*."

"No fear of that," with emphasis.

"Well, I'm sorry now you are going out there, for several reasons. I would have preferred China or Australia, but Waring has his say and his way."

"And I had *my* say and my way too, Uncle Ben. India is my native land; I remember it distinctly—the servants with their dark faces and big white turbans, my little chestnut pony, which was called the 'Lal Tatoo,' and I want to see my father.

You know we have not met for fifteen years."

"I know," assented Mr. Pollitt, gloomily, and added, after a pause, "I wonder now, if it would be possible for you to throw me over—and stop out there with him!"

"There is not the smallest probability of that. Besides, my father does not want me."

"And supposing that he *did!*" exclaimed Mr. Pollitt, suddenly jumping up and beginning to walk about the room. "Bear this in view, that you must make up your mind between us! You cannot be son and heir to *two* men! You can pay him a visit of a week, or at most a month; but if you postpone coming home at his request—I warn you, that you may stay in India till I fetch you! To put the matter in a nutshell, I wash my hands of you for ever! Not one farthing of my money will you see," he continued, speaking in great excitement. "I shall leave every shilling to hospitals, you understand that, eh?" he gasped, breathless.

"Yes, and it would be but just. I cannot live with my father in India and be your adopted son at home, but you are needlessly alarmed. I shall turn up again within a year without fail. I'll take a return ticket if you like."

"Well, that's a bargain, my boy. I'm a bit jealous of your father, and it's a nasty, low, ungentlemanly feeling. I must confess that I have been glad that he, so to speak, dropped you. But he handed you over to me when he married the Begum, and you are *my* son—not his."

The day of departure arrived; the valet (a somewhat garrulous person, with superb references), in charge of three cabs loaded with baggage, preceded the travellers to Victoria, whilst Mr. and Mrs. Pollitt drove the young men in the family landau, in order to see the last of them.

As Mark and his uncle slowly paced the platform, the latter, who had been incessantly fussy all the morning, said—

"Now, I hope nothing has been for-

gotten, and that you have everything you want?"

"I'm sure we have—and ten times over."

"You will write often—once a week—if only a line, eh? Mind you don't forget us."

"No fear of that, Uncle Dan."

"And remember our bargain. Though I have not taken return tickets, after all. Don't stay longer than the year. I don't know how I'm to get on without you. I can never use the mail-phaeton now, for I hate sitting beside the coachman—and—you know, I tried to drive once—and the result. There will be no one to take me on the river on a hot afternoon — other people but you think an old fogey has no business there. Oh, I shall miss you! I've lodged money for you in Bombay with Bostock & Bell's" (naming a magnificent sum), "and when it's done, you must come home, for I won't send you another stiver. It's in your name, of course—you will be paymaster."

"All right, uncle."

"Keep your cheque-book locked up. Don't let a tiger get hold of you, or one of those scheming, husband-hunting women that Clarence talks about."

"You may make your mind quite easy on that score," with a rather derisive smile.

"Well, time is up, my dear boy. I am sorry you are going; take care of yourself. God bless you!" wringing his hand as he spoke.

Meanwhile Mrs. Pollitt and her brother had also been having a few parting words.

"Now, Clar," she said impressively, "I have done a good thing for you. This is a splendid chance. Be sure you make the most of it; if you please the 'uncle,' as you call him, he will help you to something better by-and-by."

Clarence nodded sagaciously. He was in the highest spirits.

"You are not really limited to time, you know," she continued, in a whisper.

"I know," and there was a significant

look in his right eye, almost approaching to a wink.

"And you will be manager—and paymaster."

"Guide, councillor, and friend, you *bet*."

"And now, dear boy, *do* be prudent; don't get into any more entanglements with grass widows; don't get into any more betting or gambling scrapes—promise me."

"I shall be as steady as old Time or young Mark himself, and I can't say more. Well, good-bye—and thanks awfully, Lina. I must say you *do* stick to your own people"—adding, with a hasty kiss—"I see we are off."

As the carriage moved slowly past the Pollitts, who were standing side by side, Clarence flung himself back with a boisterous laugh, as he exclaimed—

"I declare, the uncle seems quite cut up—ha, ha, ha! Upon my soul, I believe the old chap is *crying!*"

CHAPTER X.

MAJOR BYNG'S SUGGESTION.

Major Byng, a wiry, dried-up little officer, with remarkably thin legs and sporting proclivities, was reclining in a long chair, in the verandah of the Napier Hotel, Poonah, smoking his after-breakfast "Trichy," and running his eye over the "Asian" pocket-book.

"Hullo, Byng, old man!" cried a loud cheerful voice, and looking up, his amaze was depicted in the countenance he turned upon Clarence Waring.

"Waring! Why—I thought," putting down his book and sitting erect.

"Thought I had gone home—sold out and was stone broke. But here I am, you see, on my legs again."

"Delighted to hear it," with a swift glance at Waring's well-to-do air and expensive-looking clothes. "Sit down, my dear boy," he cried cordially, "sit down and have a cheroot, and tell me all about yourself and what has brought you back again to the land of regrets? Is it tea, coffee, or gold?"

"Gold, in one sense. I am companion to a young millionaire, or rather to the nephew of a man who has so much money —and *no* children—that he does not know what to do."

"And who is the young man? Does *he* know what to do?"

"His name is Jervis—his rich uncle is married to my sister; we are connections, you see, and when he expressed a desire to explore the gorgeous East, my sister naturally suggested *me* for the post of guide, philosopher, and friend."

Here Major Byng gave a short sharp laugh, like a bark.

"We landed in Bombay ten days ago,

and are going to tour about and see the world."

"What is the programme?"

"*My* programme is as follows: Poonah races, Secunderabad races, Madras races, a big game shoot in Travancore, expense no object, elephants, beaters, club-cook, coolies with letters, and ice for the champagne. Then I shall run him about in the train a bit, and show him Delhi, Agra, Jeypore; after that we will put in the end of the cold weather in Calcutta. I have lots of pals there, and from Calcutta we will go to the hills, to Shirani. I shall be glad to see the old club again—many a fleeting hour have I spent there!"

"That same club had a shocking bad name for gambling and bear fighting," said Major Byng significantly.

"I believe it had, now you mention it; but you may be sure that it has reformed —like myself."

"And this young fellow—what is he like?"

"Quiet, gentlemanly, easy-going, easily pleased, thinks every one a good sort," and Waring laughed derisively; "abhors all fuss or show, never bets, never gets up in the morning with a head, no expensive tastes."

"In fact, his tastes are miserably beneath his opportunities! What a pity it is that the millionaire is not *your* uncle!"

"Yes, instead of merely brother-in-law, and brothers-in-law are notoriously unfeeling. However, I have adopted mine as my own blood relation, for the present. *I* boss the show. Come and dine with me to-night, and tell me all the 'gup,' and give me the straight tip for the Arab purse."

"All right. Is this young Jervis a sportsman?"

"He is a first-class man on a horse, and he plays polo, but he does not go in for racing—more's the pity!"

"Plays polo, does he? By Jove!" and an eager light shone in the major's little greenish eyes. "I've a couple of ponies for sale——"

"He does not want them now, whatever he may do later in Calcutta or in the hills. I shall be looking out for three or four for myself, good sound ones, mind you, Byng, up to weight. I've put on flesh, you see, but I dare say my anxious responsibilities will wear me down a bit. Jervis does not weigh more than ten stone, and, talk of the devil, here he comes."

Major Byng turned his head quickly, as at this moment Waring's travelling companion, a slight, active-looking young man, entered the compound, closely pursued by a swarm of hawkers, and their accompanying train of coolies, bearing on their heads the inevitable Poonah figures, hand-screens, pottery, beetle-work, silks, silver, and jewellery.

"I say, Waring," he called out as he approached, "just look at me! One would think I was a queen bee. If this goes on, you will have to consign me to a lunatic asylum, if there is such a place out here."

"Mark, let me introduce you to my old friend, Major Byng."

Major Byng bent forward in his chair—to stand up was too great an exertion even to greet a possible purchaser of polo ponies—smiled affably, and said—

"You are only just out, I understand. How do you like India?"

"So far, I loathe it," sitting down as he spoke, removing his topee, and wiping his forehead. "Ever since I landed, I have lived in a state of torment."

"Ah, the mosquitoes!" exclaimed Major Byng, sympathetically; "you will get used to them. They always make for new arrivals and fresh blood."

"No, no; but human mosquitoes! Touts, hawkers, beggars, jewellers, horse-dealers. They all set upon me from the moment I arrived. Ever since then, my life is a burthen to me. It was pretty bad on board ship. Some of our fellow-travellers seemed to think I was a great celebrity, instead of the common or ordinary passenger; they

loaded me with civil speeches, and the day we got into Bombay I was nearly buried alive in invitations, people were *so* sorry to part with me!"

"Here is a nice young cynic for you!" exclaimed Captain Waring, complacently. "He is not yet accustomed to the fierce light that beats upon a good-looking young bachelor, heir to thirty thousand a year——"

"Why not make it a hundred thousand at once, while you are about it?" interrupted the other impatiently. "How could they tell I was *heir* to any one? I'm sure I am a most everyday-looking individual. My uncle's income is not ticketed on my back!"

"It was in one sense," exclaimed Waring, with a chuckle.

"It was only with the common, vulgar class that I was so immensely popular."

"My dear fellow, you are much too humble minded. You were popular with every one."

"No, by no means; I could have hugged the supercilious old dame who asked me with a drawl if I was in any way related to Pollitt's patent fowl food? I was delighted to answer with effusion, 'Nephew, ma'am.' *She* despised me from the very bottom of her soul, and made no foolish effort to conceal her feelings."

"Ah! She had no *daughters*," rejoined Waring, with a scornful laugh. "The valet told all about you. He had nothing on earth to do, but magnify his master and consequently exalt himself. Your value is reflected in your gentleman's gentleman, and he had no mock modesty, and priced you at a cool million! By the way, I saw him driving off just now in the best hotel landau, with his feet on the opposite cushions, and a cigarette in his mouth. He is a magnificent advertisement."

They were now the centre of a vast mob of hawkers, who formed a squatting circle, and the verandah was fully stocked. The jewellers had already untied their nice

little tin boxes from their white calico wrappers, and their contents were displayed on the usual enticing squares of red saloo.

"Waring Sahib!" screamed an ancient vendor with but one eye. "Last time, three four years ago, I see you at Charleville Hotel, Mussouri, I sell your honour one very nice diamond bangle for one pretty lady——"

"Well, Crackett, I'm not such a fool now. I want a neat pearl pin for myself." He proceeded to deliberately select one from a case, and then added with a grin, "That time, *I* paying for lady; *this* time, gentleman," pointing to Jervis, "paying for *me*."

"I can't stand it," cried Jervis, jumping to his feet. "Here is the man with the chestnut Arab and the spotted cob with pink legs, that has been persecuting me for two days; and here comes the boy with the stuffed peacock who has stalked me all morning; and—I see the girl in the thunder and lightning waistcoat. I know she is

going to ask me to ride with her," and he snatched up his topee and fled.

Major Byng noticed Jervis at the *table d'hôte* that evening. He had been cleverly "cut off" from Waring, and was the prey of two over-dressed, noisy young women. Mrs. Pollitt was mistaken, second-rate people *did* come to India.

"I'll tell you what, Waring!" he said to that gentleman, who was in his most jovial, genial humour, "that young fellow is most shamefully mobbed. His valet has given him away. If you don't look out, he will slip his heel ropes and bolt home. Pray observe his expression! Just look at those two women, especially at the one who is measuring the size of her waist with her *serviette*, for his information. He will go back by the next steamer; it is written on his forehead!"

"No, he won't do that," rejoined Clarence, with lazy confidence. "He has a most particular reason for staying out here for a while; but I grant you that he is not

enjoying himself, and does not appear to appreciate seeing the world—and it is not a bad old world if you know the right way to take it. Now, if *I* were in his shoes," glancing expressively across the table, "I'd fool that young woman to the very top of her bent!"

In the billiard-room, when Mark joined them, Major Byng said—

"I saw your dismal plight at dinner, and pitied you. If you want to lead a quiet life, and will take an old soldier's advice, I would say, get rid of the valet, send him home with half your luggage. Then start from a fresh place, where no one knows you, with a good Mussulman bearer, who is a complete stranger to your affairs. Let Clarence here be pay-master — he can talk the language, and looks wealthy and important — *he* won't mind bearing the brunt, or being taken for a rich man if the trouble breaks out again, and you can live in peace and gang your ain gait."

The Major's advice was subsequently acted upon,—with most excellent results. The cousins meanwhile attended the Poonah races, where Clarence met some old acquaintances.

One of them privately remarked to Major Byng—

"Waring seems to have nine lives, like a cat, and looks most festive and prosperous. I saw him doing a capital ready-money business with the 'Bookies' just now—and he is a good customer to the Para Mutual. It is a little startling to see *him* in the character of mentor. I only hope he won't get into *many* scrapes!"

"Oh, Telemachus has his head screwed on pretty tight, and he will look after Waring—the pupil will take care of the teacher. He is a real good sort, that boy. I wonder if his people know how old Clarence used to race, and carry on and gamble at the lotteries, and generally play the devil when he was out here?"

"Not they!" emphatically.

"He owes me one hundred rupees this three years, but he is such a tremendous Bahadur now, that I am ashamed to remind him of such a trifling sum. I sincerely hope that he has turned over a new leaf and is a reformed character. What do you say, Crompton?"

"I say 'Amen,' with all my heart," was the prompt response.

Mark Jervis had gone straight to the agents, Bostock & Bell's, the day he had landed in Bombay, and asked for his father's address. He only obtained it with difficulty and after considerable delay. The head of the firm, in a private interview, earnestly entreated him to keep the secret, otherwise they would get into trouble, as Major Jervis was a *peculiar* man and most mysterious about his affairs, which were now entirely managed by a Mr. Cardozo. Major Jervis had not corresponded with them personally, for years. He then scribbled something on a card, which he handed to the new arrival,

who eagerly read, "Mr. Jones, Hawal-Ghât, via Shirani, N.W.P." The major's son despatched a letter with this superscription by the very next post.

CHAPTER XI.

A RESERVED LADY.

A HOT moonless night towards the end of March, and the up-mail from Bombay to Calcutta has come to a standstill. The glare from the furnace and the carriage lamps lights up the ghostly looking telegraph-posts, the dusty cactus hedge, and illuminates a small portion of the surrounding jungle. Anxiously gazing eyes see no sign of a station, or even of a signalman's hut, within the immediate glare — and beyond it there looms a rocky, barren tract, chiefly swallowed up in inscrutable darkness.

There is a babel of men's voices, shrill

and emotional, and not emanating from European throats, a running of many feet, and above all is heard the snorting of the engine and the dismal shrieks of the steam whistle.

"What does it all mean?" inquired a silvery treble, and a fluffy head leant out of a first-class ladies' compartment.

"Nothing to be alarmed about," responded a pleasant tenor voice from the permanent way. "There has been a collision between two goods trains about a mile ahead, and the line is blocked."

"Any one killed?" she drawled.

"Only a couple of niggers," rejoined the pleasant voice, in a cheerful key.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the lady with sudden animation; "why, Captain Waring, surely it cannot be you!"

"Pray why not?" now climbing up on the foot-board. "And do I behold Mrs. Bellett?" as the head and shoulders of a good-looking man appeared at the window, and looked into the carriage, which

contained a mountain of luggage, two ladies, a monkey, and a small green parrot.

"Where have you dropped from?" she inquired. "I thought you had left India for ever and ever. What has brought you back?"

"The remembrance of happier days," he answered, with a sentimental air, "and a P. and O. steamer."

"But you have left the service, surely?"

"Yes, three years ago; it was too much of a grind at home. Formerly I was in India on duty, now I am out here for pleasure. No bother about over-staying my leave—no fear of brass hats."

"Meanwhile, is there any fear of our being run into by another train?" inquired the second lady nervously, a lady who sat at the opposite side of the compartment with her head muffled up in a pink shawl.

"Not the smallest; we are perfectly safe."

"Captain Waring, this is my sister, Mrs. Coote," explained Mrs. Bellett. "And now

perhaps you can tell us where we are, and what is to become of us?"

"As to where you are, you are about three miles from Okara Junction; as to what will happen to you, I am afraid that you will have to walk there under my escort—if I may be permitted that honour."

"Walk three miles!" she repeated shrilly. "Why, I have not done such a thing for years, and I have on thin shoes. Could we not go on the engine?"

"Yes, if the engine could fly over nearly a hundred luggage waggons. It is a fine starlight night; we will get a lamp, and can keep along the line. They have sent for a break-down gang, and we shall catch another train at Okara. We will only have about an hour or two to wait."

"Well, I suppose we must make the best of it!" said Mrs. Coote, "like others," as numbers of natives flocked past, chattering volubly, and carrying their bedding and bundles.

"I wish we could get supper at Okara,"

said her sister. "I am sure we shall want it after our tramp; but I know we need not build on anything better than a goat chop, and the day before yesterday's curry. However, I have a tea-basket."

"I can go one better," said Captain Waring. "I have a tiffin-basket, well supplied with ice, champagne, cold tongue, potted grouse—cake—fruit——"

"You are making me quite ravenous," cried Mrs. Bellett. "But how are you to get all these delicacies to Okara?"

"By a coolie, I hope. If the worst comes to the worst, I will carry them on my head, sooner than leave them behind. However, rupees work wonders, and I expect I shall get hold of as many as will carry the basket, and also your baggage; I suppose fifty will do?" and with a grin, he climbed down out of sight.

"What a stroke of luck, Nettie!" exclaimed Mrs. Bellett. "He used to be such a friend of mine at Mussouri, and imagine coming across him in this way!

He seems to be rolling in money; he must have come in for a fortune, for he used to be frightfully hard up. I'm so glad to meet him."

"Yes, it's all very fine for *you*, who are dressed," rejoined the other in a peevish voice; "but just look at me in an old tea-jacket, with my hair in curling-pins!"

"Oh, you were all right! I'm certain he never noticed you!" was the sisterly reply. "Let us be quick and put up our things. I wish to goodness the ayah was here," and she began to bustle about, and strap up wraps and pillows, and collect books and fans.

Every one in the train seemed to be in a state of activity, preparing for departure, and presently many parties on foot, with lanterns, might be seen streaming along the line. Captain Waring promptly returned with a dozen coolies, and soon Mrs. Bellett's carriage was empty. She and her sister were assisted by Captain Waring and a young man—presumably his companion.

Ere descending, Mrs. Bellett, who had a pretty foot, paused on the step to exhibit the thinness of her shoes, and demanded, as she put out her Louis-Quatorze sole, "how she was to walk three miles in *that*, along a rough road?"

The two ladies were nevertheless in the highest spirits, and appeared to enjoy the novelty of the adventure. Ere the quartette had gone twenty yards, the guard came shouting after them—

"Beg pardon, sir," to Captain Waring, "but there is a lady quite alone in my charge. I can't take her on; I must stay and see to the baggage, and remain here. And would you look after her?"

"Where is she?" demanded Waring, irritably.

"Last carriage but one—reserved ladies, first-class."

"I say, Mark," turning to his friend, "if she is a reserved lady, you are all right. He is awfully shy, this young fellow," he explained to his other companions, with a

loud laugh. "I don't mind betting that she is old—and you know you are fond of old women—so just run back like a good chap. You see, I have Mrs. Bellett and her sister—you won't be five minutes behind us, bring on the reserved lady as fast as you can."

The other made no audible reply, but obediently turned about, and went slowly past the rows of empty carriages until he came nearly to the end of the train. Here he discovered a solitary white figure standing above him in the open door of a compartment, and a girlish voice called down into the dark—

"Is that you, guard?"

"No," was the answer; "but the guard has sent me to ask if I can help you in any way."

A momentary pause, and then there came a rather doubtful "Thank you."

"Your lamp has gone out, I see, but I can easily strike a match and get your things together. There is a block on the

line, and you will have to get down and walk on to the next station."

"Really? Has there been an accident? I could not make out what the people were saying."

"It is not of much consequence — two goods trains disputing the right way; but we shall have to walk to Okara to catch the Cawnpore mail."

"Is it far?"

"About three miles, I believe."

"Oh, that is not much! I have not many things—only a dressing-bag, a rug, and a parasol."

"All right; if you will pass them down, I will carry them."

"But surely there is a porter," expostulated the lady, "and I need not trouble you."

"I don't suppose there is what *you* call a porter nearer than Brindisi, and all the coolies are taking out the luggage. Allow me to help you."

In another second the young lady, who

was both light and active, stood beside him on the line. She was English; she was tall; and she wore a hideously shaped country-made topee—that was all that he could make out in the dim light.

"Now, shall we start?" he asked briskly, taking her bag, rug, and parasol.

"Please let me have the bag," she entreated. "I—I—that is to say, I would rather keep it myself. All my money is in it."

"And I may be a highwayman for what you know," he returned, with a laugh. "I give you my word of honour that, if you will allow me to carry it, I will not rob you."

"I did not mean that," she stammered.

"Then what did you mean? At any rate *I* mean to keep it. The other passengers are on ahead—I suppose you are quite alone?"

"Almost. There is a servant in the train who is supposed to look after me, but I am looking after him, and seeing that he is not left behind at the different junctions.

We cannot understand one word we exchange, so he grins and gesticulates, and I nod and point; but it all comes to nothing, or worse than nothing. I wanted some tea this morning, and he brought me whisky and soda."

"And have you no one to rely on but this intelligent attendant?"

"No. The people I came out with changed at Khandala, and left me in charge of the guard, and in a through carriage to Allahabad; and of course we never expected this."

"So you have just come out from home?" he observed, as they walked along at a good pace.

"Yes; arrived yesterday morning in the *Arcadia*."

"Then this is the first time you have actually set foot on Indian soil, for trains and gharries do not count?"

"It is. Are there"—looking nervously at the wild expanse on either hand—"any tigers about, do you think?"

"No, I sincerely hope not, as I have no weapon but your parasol. Joking apart, you are perfectly safe. This"—with a wave of the aforesaid parasol—"is not their style of hunting-ground."

"And what is their style, as you call it?"

"Oh, lots of high grass and jungle, in a cattle country."

"Have you shot many tigers?"

"Two last month. My friend and I had rather good sport down in Travancore."

"I suppose you live out here?"

"No, I have only been about six months in the country."

"I wish *I* had been six months in India."

"May I ask why?"

"Certainly you may. Because I would be going home in six months more."

"And you only landed forty-eight hours ago! Surely you are not tired of it already. I thought all young ladies liked India. Mind where you are going! It is very dark here. Will you take hold of my arm?"

"No, thank you," rather stiffly.

"Then my hand? You really had better, or you will come a most awful cropper, and trip over the sleepers."

"Here is an extraordinary adventure!" said Honor to herself. "What would Jessie and Fairy say, if they could see me now, walking along in the dark through a wild desolate country, hand-in-hand with an absolutely strange young man, whose face I have never even seen?"

A short distance ahead were groups of chattering natives—women with red dresses and brass lotahs, which caught the light of their hand-lanterns (a lantern is to a native what an umbrella is to a Briton); turbaned, long-legged men, who carried bundles, lamps, and sticks. The line was bordered on either hand by thick hedges of greyish cactus; here and there glimmered a white flower; here and there an ancient bush showed bare distorted roots, like the ribs of some defunct animal. Beyond stretched a dim mysterious landscape, which looked

weird and ghostly by the light of a few pale stars. The night was still and oppressively warm.

"You will be met at Allahabad, I suppose?" observed Honor's unknown escort, after a considerable silence.

"Yes—by my aunt."

"You must be looking forward to seeing her again?"

"*Again!* I have never seen her as yet." She paused, and then continued, "We are three girls at home, and my aunt and uncle wished to have one of us on a visit, and *I* came."

"Not very willingly, it would seem," with a short laugh.

"No; I held out as long as I could. I am—or rather was—the useful one at home."

"And did your aunt and uncle stipulate for the most useful niece?"

"By no means—they—they, to tell you the truth, they asked for the *pretty* one, and I am not the beauty of the family."

"No? Am I to take your word for that, or are you merely fishing?"

"I assure you that I am not. I am afraid my aunt will be disappointed; but it was unavoidable. My eldest sister writes, and could not well give up what she calls her literary customers. My next sister is—is—not strong, and so they sent me—a *dernier ressort*."

She was speaking quite frankly to this stranger, and felt rather ashamed of her garrulity; but he had a pleasant voice, he was the first friendly soul she had come across since she had left home, and she was desperately home-sick. A long solitary railway journey had only increased her complaint, and she was ready to talk of home to *any one*—would probably have talked of it to the chuprassi,—if he could have understood her!

Her escort had been an unscrupulous, selfish little woman, whose nurse, having proved a bad sailor, literally saddled her good-natured, inexperienced charge with

the care of two unruly children, and this in a manner that excited considerable indignation among her fellow passengers.

"Why should you call yourself a *dernier ressort?*" inquired her companion, after a pause, during which they continued to stumble along, she holding timidly by the young man's arm.

"Because I am; and I told them at home with my very last breath that I was not a bit suited for coming out here, and mixing with strangers—nothing but strangers—and going perpetually into what is called 'smart' society, and beginning a perfectly novel kind of life. I shall get into no end of scrapes."

"May I ask your reason for this dismal prophecy?"

"Surely you can guess! Because I cannot hold my tongue. I blurt out the first thing that comes into my head. If I think a thing wrong, or odd, I must say so; I cannot help it, I am incurable. People at home are used to me, and don't mind.

Also, I have a frightful and wholly unconscious habit of selecting the most uncomfortable topics, and an extremely bad memory for the names and faces of people with whom I have but a slight acquaintance; so you see that I am not likely to be a social success!"

"Let us hope that you take a gloomy view of yourself. For instance, what is your idea of an uncomfortable topic?"

"If I am talking to a person with a cast in the eye, I am positively certain ere long to find myself conversing volubly about squints; or, if my partner wears a wig, I am bound to bring wigs on the tapis. I believe I am possessed by some mischievous imp, who enjoys my subsequent torture."

"Pray how do you know that *I* have not a squint, or a wig, or both? A wig would not be half a bad thing in this hot climate; to take off your hair as you do your hat would often be a great relief! Ah, here we are coming to the scene of the collision at last," and presently they passed by a

long row of waggons, and then two huge engines, one across the line, the other reared up against it; an immense bonfire burnt on the bank, and threw the great black monsters into strong outline. Further on they came to a gate and level crossing. The gate of the keeper's hut stood wide open, and on the threshold a grey-haired old woman sat with her head between her knees, sobbing; within were moans, as if wrung from a sufferer in acute anguish. Honor's unknown companion suddenly halted, and exclaimed impulsively—

"I'm afraid some one has been badly hurt; if you don't mind, I'll just go and see."

Almost ere she had nodded a quick affirmative, he had vaulted over the gate, and left her.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO GOOD SAMARITANS.

In all her life, the youngest Miss Gordon had never felt so utterly solitary or forsaken as now, when she stood alone on the line of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway. Before her the party of natives, with their twinkling lanterns, were gradually reaching vanishing point; behind her was a long, still procession of trucks and waggons, that looked like some dreadful black monster waiting for its prey; on either hand stretched the greyish unknown mysterious landscape, from which strange unfamiliar sounds, in the shape of croakings and cries, were audible. Oh! when would her nameless companion return? She glanced

anxiously towards the hut, it was beyond the gate, and down a steep bank, away from the road; animated figures seemed to pass to and fro against the lighted open door. Ah! here came one of them, her escort, who had in point of fact been only absent five minutes, and not, as she imagined, half an hour.

"It is a stoker who has been cut about the head and badly scalded," he explained breathlessly. "They are waiting for an apothecary from Okara, and meanwhile they are trying a native herb and a charm. They don't seem to do the poor chap much good. I think I might be able to do something better for him, though I have no experience, beyond seeing accidents at football and out hunting; but I cannot leave you here like this, and yet I cannot well ask you inside the hut, the heat is like a furnace—and—altogether — it — it would be too much for you, but if you would not mind waiting outside just for a few minutes, I'd get you something to sit on."

"Thank you, but I would rather go in—I have attended an ambulance class—'first aid,' you know, and perhaps I may be of some little use; there is sticking-plaster, eau-de-Cologne, and a pair of scissors in my bag."

"Well, mind; you must brace up your nerves," he answered, as he pushed open the gate, and led her down the crumbling sandy incline.

The heat within the hut was almost suffocating; as the girl, following her guide, entered, every eye was instantly fixed upon her in wide surprise.

By the light of a small earthen lamp, which smoked horribly, she distinguished the figure of a man crouching on the edge of a charpoy; he was breathing in hard hoarse gasps, and bleeding from a great gash above his eye.

A Eurasian, in a checked cotton suit, stood by, talking incessantly—but doing nothing else. There were also present, besides the old woman — a veritable shrivelled-up hag — two native men,

possibly the "bhai-bands," or chums of the sufferer; in a corner, a large black pariah sat watching everything, with a pair of unwinking yellow eyes; and on another charpoy lay a still figure, covered with a sheet. A few earthen chatties, a mat, a huka, and some gaudy English prints—for the most part nailed upside down—completed the picture. Hitherto the travelling companions had been to each other merely the embodiment of an undefined figure and a voice; the light of the little mud lamp, whose curling smoke threw outlines of dancing black devils on the walls, now introduced them for the first time face to face. To Honor Gordon stood revealed an unexpectedly good-looking young man, slight and well built, with severely cut features, and a pair of handsome hazel eyes, which were surveying her gravely. A gentleman, not merely in his speech and actions, but in his bearing.

He, on his part, was not in the least surprised to behold a pale but decidedly

pretty girl; by means of some mysterious instinct he had long made up his mind that the owner of such a delicate hand and sweet clear voice could not be otherwise than fair to see.

"The apothecary cannot be here for one hour!" exclaimed the Eurasian, glibly. "He," pointing to the patient, "is very bad. We have put some herbs to his arm, and the back of his head; but I, myself, think that he will *die*!" he concluded with an air of melancholy importance.

Some kind of a bandage was the first thing Honor asked for, and asked for in vain; she then quickly unwound the puggaree from her topee, and tore it into three parts.

Then she bathed and bandaged the man's head, with quick and sympathetic fingers, whilst Jervis held the lamp, offered suggestions, and looked on, no less impressed than amazed; he had hitherto had an idea that girls always screamed and shrank away from the sight of blood and horrors.

This girl, though undeniably white, was as cool and self-possessed, as firm, yet gentle, as any capable professional nurse.

The scalded arm and hand—a shocking spectacle—were attended to by both. The great thing was to exclude the air, and give the sufferer at least temporary relief. With some native flour, a bandage was deftly applied, the arm placed in a sling, and the patient's head was bathed with water and eau-de-Cologne. Fanned assiduously by the girl's fan, he began to feel restored, he had been given heart, he had been assured that his hurts were not mortal, and presently he languidly declared himself better.

The natives who stood round, whilst the sahib and Miss Sahib ministered so quickly and effectually to their friend, now changed their lamentations to loud ejaculations of wonder and praise. Miss Gordon was amazed to hear her companion giving directions to these spectators in fluent and sonorous Hindustani, and still more astounded when, as she took up her topee,

preparatory to departure, the Eurasian turned to him, and said in an impressive squeak—

"Sir, your wife is a saint—an angel of goodness"—and then, as an hasty afterthought, he added, "and beauty!"

Before Jervis could collect his wits and speak, she had replied—

"I am not this gentleman's wife; we are only fellow-passengers. Why should you think so?" she demanded sharply.

"Because—oh, *please* do not be angry—you looked so suitable," he answered with disarming candour. "Truly, I hope you may be married *yet*, and I wish you both riches, long life, and great happiness," he added, bowing very low, lamp in hand.

Honor passed out of the hut, with her head held extraordinarily high, scrambled up the bank, and proceeded along the line at a headlong pace in indignant silence.

She now maintained a considerable distance between herself and her escort; no doubt her eyes were becoming accustomed

to the dim light, and at any rate there was that in her air which prevented him offering either arm or hand. In spite of the recent scene in which they had both been actors, where he had clipped hair and cut plaster, and she had applied bandages and scanty remedies to the same "case," they were not drawn closer together; on the contrary, they were much further apart than during the first portion of their walk, and the young lady's confidences had now entirely ceased. She confined herself exclusively to a few bald remarks about the patient, and the climate, remarks issued at intervals of ten minutes, and her answers to his observations were confined to "Yes" and "No." At last Okara station was reached; and, to tell the truth, neither of them were sorry to bring their *tête-à-tête* to a conclusion. The dazzling lights on the platform made their eyes blink, as they threaded their way to the general refreshment room, discovering it readily enough by sounds of many and merry voices, who

were evidently availing themselves of its somewhat limited resources.

It was not a very large apartment, but it was full. The table was covered with a thin native tablecloth, two large lamps with punkah tops, and two cruet-stands and an American ice-pitcher were placed at formal intervals down the middle. It was surrounded with people, who were eating, drinking, and talking. At the further end sat Captain Waring, supported on either hand by his two fair companions, three men—young and noisy, whom they evidently knew—and a prim, elderly woman, who looked inexpressibly shocked at the company, and had pointedly fenced herself off from Mrs. Bellett with a teapot and a wine-card. Captain Waring's friends had not partaken of tea (as the champagne-bottle testified). The tongue, cake, and fruit had also evidently received distinguished marks of their esteem. Mrs. Bellett put up her long eyeglass, and surveyed exhaustively the pair who now entered.

"Hullo, Mark! What ages you have been!" exclaimed his cousin. "We can make room at this corner—come along, old man."

Mark and his companion found themselves posted at the two corners at the end of the table, and were for the moment the cynosure of all eyes.

In a few seconds, as soon as the newcomers had been looked after and given the scraps, the party continued their interrupted conversation with redoubled animation. They all appeared to know one another intimately. Captain Waring had evidently fallen among old friends. They discussed people and places—to which the others were strangers—and Mrs. Bellett was particularly animated, and laughed incessantly—chiefly at her own remarks.

"And so Lalla Paske is going to her Aunt Ida? I thought Ida Langrishe *hated* girls. I wonder if she will be able to manage her niece, and what sort of a chaperon she will make?"

"A splendid one, I should say," responded a man in a suit like a five-barred gate—"on the principle of set a thief to catch a thief."

"And old Mother Brande, up at Shirani, is expecting a niece too. What fun it will be! What rivalry between her and Ida! What husband-hunting, and scheming, and match-making! It will be as good as one of Oscar Wilde's plays. I am rather sorry that I shall not be there to see. I shall get people to write to me—you for one, Captain Waring," and she nodded at him graciously.

Mark noticed his companion, who had been drinking water (deluded girl—railway station water), put down her glass hastily, and fix her eyes on Mrs. Bellett. No one could call her pale *now*.

"I wonder what Mrs. Brande's niece will be like?" drawled her sister. "I wonder if she, like her aunt, has been in domestic service. He, he, he!" she giggled affectedly.

There was a general laugh, in the midst of which a clear treble voice was heard—

"If you particularly wish to know, I can answer *that* question." It was the pale girl who was speaking.

Mrs. Coote simply glared, too astounded to utter a syllable.

"I was not aware that my aunt had ever been in domestic service; but I can relieve you at once of all anxiety about myself. I have never been in any situation, and *this* is the nearest approach I have ever made to the servants' hall!"

If the lamp in front of them had suddenly exploded, there could scarcely have been more general consternation. Mrs. Bellett gasped like a newly-landed fish; Captain Waring, purple with suppressed laughter, was vainly cudgelling his brain for some suitable and soothing remark, when the door was flung back by the guard, bawling—

"Take your seats—take your seats, please, passengers by the Cawnpore mail."

Undoubtedly the train had never arrived at a more propitious moment. The company rose with one consent, thrust back their chairs, snatched up their parcels, and hurried precipitately out of the room, leaving Honor and her escort *vis-à-vis* and all alone.

"If those are specimens of English-women in India," she exclaimed, "give *me* the society of the natives; that dear old creature in the hut was far more of a lady."

"Oh, you must not judge by Mrs. Bellett! I am sure she must be unique. I have never seen any one like her, so far," he remarked consolingly.

"I told you," becoming calmer, and rising as she spoke, "that I could not hold my tongue. I can *not* keep quiet. You see I have lost no time—I have begun already. Of course, the proper thing for me to have done would have been to sit still and make no remark, instead of hurling a bombshell into the enemy's camp. I have disgraced myself and you; they will

say, 'Evil communications corrupt good manners.' I can easily find a carriage. Ah, here is my treasure of a chuprassi. You have been extremely kind; but your friends are waiting for you, and really you had better not be seen with me any longer."

She was very tall; and when she drew herself up their eyes were nearly on a level. She looked straight at him, and held out her hand with a somewhat forced smile.

He smiled also as he replied, "I consider it an honour to be seen with you, under any circumstances, and I shall certainly see you off. Our train is not leaving for five minutes. A ladies' compartment, I presume, and *not* with Mrs. Bellett?"

They walked slowly along the platform, past the carriage in which Mrs. Bellett and her sister were arranging their animals and parcels with much shrill hilarity.

Miss Gordon was so fortunate as to secure a compartment to herself—the imbecile chuprassi gibbering and gesticulating,

whilst the sahib handed in her slender stock of belongings. As the train moved away, she leant out of the window and nodded a smiling farewell.

How good-looking he was as he stood under the lamp with his hat off! How nice he had been to her—exactly like a brother! She drew back with a long breath, that was almost a sigh, as she said to herself, "Of course I shall never see him again."

CHAPTER XIII.

TOBY JOY.

LETTER from Mrs. Brande, Allahabad, to Pelham Brande, Esq., Shirani: —

"DEAR P.

"She arrived yesterday, so you may expect us on Saturday. Send Nubboo down to Nath Tal Dak Bungalow on Thursday, to cook our dinner, and don't allow him *more* than *six* coolies and *one* pony. Honor seems to feel the heat a great deal, though she is thin, and not fat like me. At first sight, I must tell you, I was *terribly* disappointed. When I saw her step out of the railway carriage, a tall girl in a crumpled white dress, with a hideous bazar topee, and no puggaree—her face

very pale and covered with smuts, I felt ready to burst into tears. She looked very nervous and surprised too. However, of course I said nothing, she wasn't to know that I had asked for the *pretty one*, and we drove back to the Hodsons' both in the very lowest spirits. She was tired, the train had broken down, and they had all to get out and walk miles in the middle of the night. After a while, when she had had her tea, and a bath, and a real good rest, and changed her dress, I declare I thought it was another person, when she walked into the room. I found her uncommonly good-looking, and in five minutes' time she seemed really pretty. She has a lovely smile and teeth to match, and fine eyes, and when she speaks her face lights up wonderfully. Her hair is brown, just plain brown, no colour in it, but very thick and fine. I know you will be awfully disappointed in her complexion, as you were such a one for admiring a beautiful skin. She has not *got any at all.*

"Just a pale clear colour and no more, but her figure is most beautiful. Indeed, every time I look at her I notice something new; now the nape of her neck, now her ears—all just so many models. She is, of course, a little shy and strange, but is simple and easily pleased; and, thank goodness, has no *grand airs*. I took her to Madame Peter (such stuff her calling herself Pierre) to order some gowns for dinner parties. I thought of a figured yellow satin and a ruby plush, she being dark; but she would not *hear* of them, and all she would take was a couple of cottons. I can see she wants to choose her own clothes, and that she would like to have a say in *mine* too; and knows a good deal about dress, and fashions, and is clever at milinery (I always forget if there are two 'L's,' but you won't mind). She says she is fond of dancing and tennis, but cannot ride or sing, which is a pity.

"She has brought a fiddle with her, and she *plays* on it, she tells me. It reminds *me* of a blind beggar with a dog for coppers,

but the Hodsons say it is all the go at home; they admire Honor immensely.

"I suppose Mrs. Langrishe's girl has arrived. I hear she is no taller than sixpence worth of half-pence, but the *biggest flirt* in India.

"Yours affectionately,

"Sarabella Brande.

"P.S.—I hope Ben is well, and that he will take to her."

Honor had also written home announcing her arrival, dwelling on her aunt's kindness, and making the best of everything, knowing that long extracts from her letter would be read aloud to inquiring friends. She felt dreadfully home-sick, as she penned her cheerful epistle. How she wished that she could put herself into the envelope, and find herself once more in that bright but faded drawing-room, with its deep window-seats, cosy chairs, and tinkling cottage piano. Every vase and bowl would be crammed with spring flowers. Jessie would be pour-

ing out tea, whilst her mother was telling her visitors that she had had a nice long letter from Honor, who was in raptures with India, and as happy as the day was long!

She took particular care that her tears did not fall upon the paper, as she penned this deceitful effusion. It was dreadful not to see one familiar face or object. This new world looked so wide, and so strange. She felt lost in the immense bedroom in which she was writing—with its bare lofty walls, matted floor, and creaking punkah. A nondescript dog from the stables had stolen in behind one of the door chicks. She called to it, eager to make friends. Surely dogs were dogs the whole world over!—but the creature did not understand what she said, simply stared interrogatively and slunk away. She saw many novel sights, as she drove in the cool of the evening in Mrs. Hodson's roomy landau, along the broad planted roads of Allahabad, and watched the bheesties watering the scorching white dust, which actually

appeared to steam and bubble; she beheld rattling ekkas, crammed with passengers, and drawn by one wicked-looking, ill-used pony; orderlies on trotting camels; fat native gentlemen in broughams, lean and pallid English sahibs in dog-carts. It was extremely warm; the so-called "evening breeze" consisted of puffs of hot wind, with a dash of sand. Most of the Allahabad ladies were already on the hills.

Mrs. Brande was far too well-seasoned an Anglo-Indian not to appreciate the wisdom of travelling in comfort. She had her own servants in attendance, and plenty of pillows, fans, ice, fruit, and eau-de-Cologne; far be it from *her* to journey with merely a hand-bag and parasol!

Honor in a comfortable corner, with several down cushions at her back, and a book on her knee, sat staring out on the unaccustomed prospect that seemed to glide slowly past the carriage windows. Here was a different country to that which she had already traversed: great tracts of

grain, poppies, and sugar cane, pointed to the principal products of the North West. She was resolved to see and note everything—even to the white waterfowl, and the long-legged cranes which lounged among the marshes—so as to be able to write full details in the next home letter.

As they passed through the Terai—that breathless belt of jungle—the blue hills began to loom largely into the view. Finally, the train drew up at a platform almost at the foot of them, and one phase of the journey was over.

Honor could not help admiring her aunt, as she stepped out with an air that betokened that she was now monarch of all she surveyed (she was encased in a cream-coloured dust-cloak and topee to match, and looked like an immense button mushroom). She briefly disposed of clamouring coolies, gave orders to her attendants in vigorous Hindustani, and led the way to the back of the station, where were a collection of long open boxes—each box had a seat, and

was tied to two poles—and all were assembled in the midst of a maddening din and accents of an unknown tongue.

"We go in these jampans," explained Mrs. Brande, briskly. "Get in, Honor, and I'll pack you up; tie on your veil, put your rug over your knees, and you will be very comfortable."

But Honor felt quite the reverse, when she found herself suddenly hoisted up on men's shoulders, and borne rapidly away in the wake of her aunt, who seemed perfectly at home under similar circumstances.

For some time they kept to a broad metalled road lined with great forest trees, then they went across a swing-bridge, up a narrow steep path, that twisted among the woods, overhanging the rocky bed of an almost dry river. This so-called bridle-path wound round the hills for miles, every sharp curve seemed to bring them higher; once they encountered a drove of pack ponies thundering down on their return journey to the plains, miserable thin little

beasts, who never seem to have time to eat —or, indeed, anything to eat, if they *had* leisure. Mrs. Brande and her party met but few people, save occasionally some broad-shouldered coolie struggling upward with a huge load bound on his back, and looking like a modern Atlas. Once they passed a jaunty native girl, riding a pony, man fashion, and exchanging gibes and repartees with her companions, and once they met a European — a young man dressed in flannels and a blazer, clattering down at break-neck speed, singing at the top of his voice, "Slattery's Mounted Foot"—a curly-headed, sunburnt, merry youth, who stopped his song and his steed the moment he caught sight of Mrs. Brande.

"Hallo!" he shouted. "Welcome back! Welcome the coming. Speed," laying his hand on his heart, "the parting guest."

"Where are you off to?" inquired the lady imperiously.

"Only to the station. We are getting

up grand theatricals; and in spite of coolies, and messages, and furious letters, none of our properties have been forwarded, and I began to suspect that the Baboo might be having a play of his own, and I am going down to look him up. Am I not energetic? Don't I deserve a vote of public thanks?"

"Pooh! Your journey is nothing," cried Mrs. Brande, with great scorn. "Why, I've been to Allahabad, where the thermometer is 95° in the shade."

"Yes, down in all the heat, and for a far more worthy object," glancing at Honor. "You may rely on me, I shall see that you are recommended for a D.S.O."

"What an impudent boy you are!" retorted the matron; and half turning her head, she said to her companion, "Honor, this is Mr. Joy—he is *quite* mad. Mr. Joy, this is my niece, Miss Gordon, just out from England" (her invariable formula).

Mr. Joy swept off his topee to his saddle-bow.

"And what's the news?" continued Mrs.

Brande. "Has Mrs. Langrishe's niece come up?" she asked peremptorily.

"Yes, arrived two days ago—the early bird, you see," he added, with a malicious twinkle of his little eyes.

"I don't see; and every one know that the worm was a *fool.* What is she like?"

"Like a fairy, and dances to match," replied Mr. Joy, with enthusiasm.

"Come, come; what do you know about fairies? Is she pretty?"

"Yes, and full of life, and go, and chic."

"Cheek! I'm not surprised at *that*, seeing she is Mrs. Langrishe's own niece."

"Chic is a French word, don't you know? and means—well, I can't exactly explain. Anyway, Miss Paske will be a great acquisition."

"How?"

"Oh, you will soon be able to judge for yourself. She acts first class, and plays the banjo like an angel."

"What nonsense you talk, Toby Joy!

Whoever heard of an angel playing anything but a 'arp."

"By the way, Miss Gordon," said Toby, turning suddenly to her, "I hope you act."

"No; I have never acted in my life."

"Oh, that is nothing! All women are born actresses. Surely, then, you sing—you have a singing face?"

"I am sorry to say that, in that case, my face belies me."

"Well, at any rate," with an air of desperation, "you could dance in a burlesque?"

"Get away!" screamed Mrs. Brande. "Dance in a burlesque! I am glad her mother does not hear you. Never mind him, Honor; he is crazy about acting and dancing, and thinks of nothing else."

"All work and no *plays*, make Jack a dull boy," he retorted.

"Who else is up?" demanded Mrs. Brande, severely.

"Oh, the usual set, I believe. Lloyds, Clovers, Valpys, Dashwoods, a signalling class, a standing camp, a baronet; there is

also a millionaire just about half way. You'll find a fellow called Waring at Nath Tal Dâk Bungalow—he was in the service once, and has now come in for tons of money, and is a gentleman at large—very keen about racing and sport. I expect he will live at our mess."

"Then he is not married?" said Mrs. Brande, in a tone of unaffected satisfaction.

"Not he! Perish the thought! He has a companion, a young chap he takes about with him, a sort of hanger-on and poor relation."

"What is he like? Of course I mean the millionaire?"

"Oh, *of course*," with an affable nod; "cheery, good-looking sort of chap, that would be an A1 hero of a novel."

Mrs. Brande glanced swiftly at Honor, and heaved a gentle sigh of contentment as she exclaimed—

"Well, I suppose we ought to be moving on."

"Yes, for you will find the bungalow

crammed with Tommies and their wives. Give the millionaire my love. Au revoir, Mrs. Brande. *Au revoir*, Miss Gordon. You'll think over the burlesque, and help us in some way, won't you?" and with a valedictory wave of his hand he dashed off.

"He is a harmless lunatic, my dear," explained the aunt to her niece, as they were carried forward side by side. "Thinks of nothing but play-acting, and always in hot water with his colonel; but no one is ever really angry with Toby, he is such a mere boy."

"He must be three and twenty, and——"

"Look at the baggage just in front," interrupted Mrs. Brande, excitedly. "These must be Captain Waring's coolies," and to Honor's amazement she imperiously called a halt, and interrogated them sharply.

"Yes, for a sahib—two sahibs at Nath Tal," grunted the hill men.

"What a quantity," she cried, shamelessly passing each load in solemn review. "See what a lovely dressing-bag and a tiffin-

basket. I believe"—reckoning—"no less than five portmanteaus, all solid leather, Captain C. Waring; and look at the gun-cases, and that big box between two men is saddlery—I know the shape."

"Oh, Aunt Sara, do you not think we ought to get on?" urged her companion. "We are delaying his men."

"My dear child, learn to know that there is *nothing* a coolie likes better than being delayed. There is no hurry, and I am really interested in this young man. I want to see where he has been, where he has come from." In answer to an imperative sentence in a tongue unknown to Honor, a grinning coolie turned his back, on which was strapped a portmanteau, for Mrs. Brande's deliberate inspection.

It proved to be covered with labels, and she read aloud with much unction and for Honor's benefit—

"Victoria—that's New South Wales—Paris, Brindisi, Bombay, Poonah, Arkomon, Calcutta, Galle, Lucknow. Bless us and

save us, he has been staying at Government House, Calcutta, and been half over the world! See what it is to have money!" and she made a sign to her jampanies to continue her journey. Presently they passed two more coolies, lightly loaded with a rather meagre kit; these she did not think it necessary to question.

"Those are the cousin's things," she explained contemptuously, "M. J., the hanger-on. Awful shabby, only a bag, and a couple of boxes. You could tell the owner was a poor man."

Honor made no reply. She began to have an idea that she had seen this poor young man before, or were two cousins travelling together for travelling's sake, a common feature in India. It would not surprise her much were she to find her companion of that three-mile walk awaiting his slender baggage at Nath Tal Bungalow.

As Mrs. Brande was borne upwards, her spirits seemed to rise simultaneously with her body. She was about to make the

acquaintance of a millionaire, and could cultivate his friendship comfortably, undisturbed by the machinations of her crafty rival. She would invite him to be her guest for the two days they would be journeying together, and by this means steal a nice long march (in every sense of the word) on Mrs. Langrishe!

CHAPTER XIV.

STEALING A MARCH.

As the sun died down, the moon arose above the hills and lighted the travellers along a path winding by the shores of an irregular mountain lake, and overhung by a multitude of cherry trees in full blossom.

"Look!" cried Mrs. Brande, joyfully, "there in front you see the lights of the Dâk Bungalow at last. You will be glad of your dinner, and I'm sure *I* shall."

Two men, who sat in the verandah of the same rest-house, would also have been most thankful for theirs. The straggling building appeared full of soldiers and their wives, and there seemed no immediate prospect of a meal. The kitchen had been taken pos-

session of by the majestic cook of a burra mem sahib, who was shortly expected, and the appetites of a couple of insignificant strangers must therefore be restrained.

These travellers were, of course, Captain Waring and Mark Jervis, whom the former invariably alluded to as "his cousin." It was a convenient title, and accounted for their close companionship. At first Mark had been disposed to correct this statement, and murmur, "Not cousins, but connections," but had been silenced by Clarence petulantly exclaiming—

"Cousins and connections are the same thing. Who cares a straw what we are? And what's the good of bothering?"

"I'm nearly mad with hunger," groaned Captain Waring. "I've eaten nothing for ten hours but one hard-boiled egg."

"Smoke, as the Indians do," suggested his comrade unfeelingly, "or draw in your belt a couple of holes. Anyway, a little starvation will do you no harm—you are getting fat."

"I wonder, if I went and sat upon the steps with a placard round my neck, on which was written, 'I am starving,' if this good lady would give us a dinner? Hunger is bad enough, but the exquisite smell of her roast mutton aggravates my pangs."

"You have only to show yourself, and she will invite you."

"How do you know, and why do you cruelly raise my hopes?"

"Because I hear that she is the soul of hospitality, and that she has the best cook on the hills."

"May I ask how you discovered this really valuable piece of information?"

"From the harum-scarum youth who passed this afternoon. He forgot to mention her name."

"Here she comes along by the weir," interrupted Waring. "Mark the excitement among the servants—*her* meal will be ready to the minute. She must be truly a great woman, and has already earned my respect. If she asks me to dinner,

I shall love her. What do you say, Mark?"

"Oh, I think, since you put it in that way, that I should find it easier to love the young lady!"

"I thought you fought shy of young ladies; and you must have cat's eyes if you can see one at this distance."

"I have the use of my ears, and I have had nothing to do, but concentrate my attention on what is evidently to be the *only* meal of the evening. I heard the cook telling the khitmatghar to lay a place for the 'Miss Sahib.'"

"What a thing it is to be observant!" cried Captain Waring. "And here they are. By George! she *is* a heavy weight!" alluding to Mrs. Brande, who was now let down with a dump, that spoke a whole volume of relief.

The lady ascended the verandah with slow and solid steps, cast a swift glance at the famishing pair, and went into her own well-warmed room, where a table neatly

laid, and adorned with cherry-blossoms, awaited her.

"Lay two more places," were her first commands to the salaaming Khitmatghar; then to her niece, "I am going to ask those two men to dinner."

"But you don't know them, Aunt Sara!" she expostulated rather timidly.

"I know of them, and that is quite enough at a dâk bungalow. We are not so stiff as you are in England; we are all, as it were, in the same set out here; and I am sure Captain Waring will be thankful to join us, unless he happens to be a born idiot. In this bungalow there is nothing to be had but candles and jam. I know it of old. People who pass up, are like a swarm of locusts, and leave nothing behind them, but empty tins and bottles. Now *I* can give him club mutton and champagne."

Having carefully arranged her dress, put on her two best diamond rings, and a blue cap (N.B. — Blue had always been her colour), Mrs. Brande sailed out into

the verandah, and thus accosted the strangers—

"I shall be very happy if you two gentlemen will dine with me in my rooms."

"You are really too good," returned Captain Waring, springing to his feet and making a somewhat exaggerated bow. "We shall be delighted, for there seems no prospect of our getting anything to eat before to-morrow."

"You shall have something to eat in less than five minutes," was Mrs. Brande's reassuring answer, as she led the way to her own apartment.

"This," waving her hand towards Honor, "is my niece, Miss Gordon, just out from England. I am Mrs. Brande—my husband is in the Council."

"We have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Gordon before," said Captain Waring; "this will not be the first time we have sat at the same table," and he glanced at her, with sly significance.

"Yes," faltered Honor, with a heightened

colour, as she bowed and shook hands with Mark. "This is the gentleman of whom I told you, Aunt Sara, who rescued me when I was left alone in the train."

"Ah! indeed," said Mrs. Brande, sitting down as she spoke, and deliberately unfolding her serviette, "I'm sure I'm greatly obliged to him," but she secretly wished that on that occasion Honor had been befriended by his rich associate.

"Let me introduce him to you, Mrs. Brande—his name is Jervis," said Captain Waring, with his most jovial air. "He is young, idle, and unmarried. My name is Waring. I was in the Rutlands, but I chucked the service some time ago."

"Well, now we know all about each other" (oh, deluded lady!) "let us begin our dinner," said Mrs. Brande. "I am sure we are all starving."

Dinner proved to be excellent, and included mahseer from the lake, wild duck from the marshes, and club mutton. No! Mrs. Brande's "chef" had not been over

praised. At first every one (especially the hostess and Clarence Waring) was too frankly hungry to talk, but after a time they began to discuss the weather, the local insects, and their journey—not in the formal manner common to Britons on their mournful travels—but in a friendly, homely fashion, suitable to a whitewashed apartment, with the hostess's bed in one corner.

Whilst the two men conversed with her niece, Mrs. Brande critically surveyed them, "took stock" as she said to herself. Captain Waring was a man of five or six and thirty, well set up, and soldierly looking; he had dark cropped hair, bold merry eyes, and was handsome, though sunburnt to a deep tan, and his face was deeply lined—those in his forehead looking as if they had been ruled and cut into the very bone—nevertheless, his habitual expression was as gay and animated as that of Toby Joy himself. He had an extremely well-to-do air (undoubtedly had never known a money care in his life), he wore his clothes

with ease, they fitted him admirably, his watch, studs, and linen were of the finest quality; moreover, he appreciated a good dinner, seemed to accept the best of everything as a matter of course, and looked about intelligently for peppers and sauces, which were fortunately forthcoming.

"The companion," as Mrs. Brande mentally called him, was a younger man, in fact a mere youth of about two and twenty, well set up, squarely built, with good shoulders and a determined mouth and chin. He wore a suit of flannels, a silver watch, with a leather chain, and looked exactly what he was—an idle, poor hanger-on!

Mrs. Brande left him to talk to Honor, and indeed entirely neglected him for his more important kinsman. Her niece was secretly aware of (and resented) her aunt's preference, and redoubled her efforts to entertain her slighted fellow-traveller. She had a fellow-feeling for him also. Were they not both dependents—both poor relations?

"Well, Captain Waring, so you are coming

up to see Shirani?" said Mrs. Brande, with her most gracious air.

"Yes, and I rather want to recall old times out here, and have a nice lazy summer in the hills."

"Then you have been in India all the winter?" (The inspection of his kit the crafty lady kept to herself.)

"Yes. We came out in October. Had a bit of a shoot in Travancore, and had a couple of months in Calcutta."

"Then perhaps you came across a Miss Paske, there? Though I don't suppose she was in the Government House set. Her uncle is a nobody."

"To be sure. We know Miss Paske, don't we, Mark? She was very much in the Government House set. All the A.D.C's adored her. A little bit of a thing, with tow-coloured, fluffy hair, and a *nez retroussé*."

"I know nothing about her nose or hair, but she is at Shirani now."

"You don't say so! I am delighted to hear it. She is capital fun!"

Mrs. Brande's face fell. She sat crumbling her bread for some seconds, and then said absently, "Did you notice those monkeys on the way up?"

She had a peculiar habit of suddenly jumping from one topic to another, figuratively, at the opposite pole. She declared that her ideas travelled at times faster than her speech, possibly she had her own consecutive, if rapid, train of thought, and may thus have connected Miss Paske with apes.

"Yes, swarms of those old grey fellows with black faces. I suppose they have a fair club at Shirani, and keep up the whist-room? Are there many men who play?"

"Only too many. I don't approve of cards—at least gambling. I do love a game of whist—I play a half-anna stamp on the rubber, just to give it a little interest."

"Do they play high at Shirani?" he asked with a touch of impatience.

"Yes, I believe they do; and that horrid old Colonel Sladen is the worst of all."

"What! is he still up here? he used to play a first-class rubber."

"He will play anything—high or low stakes—at either night or day—he pays—his wife pays," concluded Mrs. Brande, looking quite ferocious.

"Oh, is she out again? Nice little woman."

"Out *again!* She has never been home yet," and she proceeded to detail that lady's grievances, whilst her companion's roving eyes settled on his cousin and Miss Gordon.

She was a remarkable-looking, even fascinating girl, quite different to his impression of her at first sight. She had a radiant smile, wonderfully expressive eyes (those eyes alone made her beautiful, and lifted her completely out of the commonplace), and a high-bred air. Strange that she should be related to this vulgar old woman, and little did the vulgar old woman guess how she had been championed by her English niece. The moon shining full on

the lake tempted the whole party out of doors. Captain Waring made a basely ungrateful (but wholly vain) attempt to exchange ladies with his friend. Mrs. Brande, however, loudly called upon him to attend her, as she paced slowly down to the road; and as he lit his cigar at his cousin's, he muttered angrily under his moustache—

"I call *this* beastly unfair. I had the old girl all dinner time. You've got six to four the best of it!"

CHAPTER XV.

A PROUD MOMENT.

Captain Waring envied his comrade, who, with Miss Gordon, sauntered on a few paces ahead of him and, what he mentally termed, "his old woman of the sea." She never ceased talking, and could not endure him out of her sight. The others appeared to get on capitally; they had plenty to say to one another, and their frequent laughter excited not alone his envy, but his amazement.

Mark was not a ladies' man; this squiring of dames was a new departure. Such an avocation was far more in his own line, and by all the laws of the fitness of things, *he* should be in Mark's place—strolling by

moonlight with a pretty girl along the shores of this lovely mountain tarn. What were they talking about? Mark never could find much to say to girls—straining his ears, not from the ungentlemanly wish to listen, but merely from pure friendly curiosity—he paid but scant attention to Mrs. Brande's questions, and gave her several misleading answers.

"His cousin had no profession—he was a gentleman at large—yes—his *protége*—yes. He himself was a man of leisure—yes." Yes—yes—yes; he said "Yes" to everything indiscriminately; it is so easy to say "Yes!"

"It is strange that we should come across one another twice on the same journey," remarked Jervis to his companion.

"If you had not come across me the first time, I suppose I should be sitting in that train still!"

"Oh no; not quite so long as all that."

"You won't say anything to aunt about——"

"Good gracious, Miss Gordon! Do you think I look like a lunatic?"

"You see, I have such a dreadful way of coming out with things, that I imagine that what is an irresistible temptation to *me*, might be the same to other people!"

"You need not be afraid, as far as I am concerned. I can answer for myself that I can hold my tongue. And how are you getting on? Still counting the hours until your departure?" with an air of gay interrogation.

"No, indeed. At first I was desperately home-sick; but I am getting over that now."

And gradually she was led on to talk of Jessie's stories, of their celebrated mulberry tree, and of the various quaint local characters. Surely there was some occult influence in the scene; or was it the frank air and pleasant voice of this young man, that thus unlocked her lips? She felt as if she had known him quite a long time; at

any rate, he was her first acquaintance in India, and she once more repeated to herself the comforting fact that he was also a poor relation—that alone was a strong bond of sympathy. As they paced the narrow road that edged the lake of Nath Tal, they laughed and talked with a mutual enjoyment that filled the mind of Captain Waring and Mrs. Brande (who were not so happily paired) with dismay on the part of the lady, and disgust on the side of the gentleman. Captain Waring would no doubt have found their conversation insipid to the last degree; it contained no sugared compliments, and not the smallest spice of sentiment or flirtation.

"I have a bargain to propose to you two gentlemen," said Mrs. Brande, ere they parted for the night. "We are going the same marches, and to the same place; I shall be happy to provide the commissariat, if you will be our escort and protect us. What do you say?" appealing to Captain Waring with a smirk.

"My dear madam, I say that we close with your offer on the spot; it is altogether in our favour," was his prompt reply.

Mrs. Brande beamed still more effulgently. There was no occasion to consult the other young man.

"Then we will consider it all settled; it is a banderbust," and taking Honor's arm, she nodded quite an affectionate good night, and retired into her own quarters.

Precisely at six o'clock the next day the party made a start—the men on sturdy hill ponies, the ladies in dandies. What can be more exquisite than a clear April morning on the lower slopes of the Himalayas? The lake was still and lay half in shadow; the dew glittered among the cherry blossoms, as if they were set in diamonds; the low rush-covered marshes were sprinkled with herds of cattle, and the doves were cooing in the dense woods that overlooked the misty blue plains. The travellers encountered many groups of hill folk, going to work among the cultivated patches lower

down, or in the neighbouring tea-gardens, as they passed through a village, a flock of delightful little brown children sallied out and tossed freshly plucked monthly roses into the ladies' laps, "so charmingly Arcadian and simple," thought Honor. But she was disillusioned, by the same little brown elves pursuing them for half a mile, with shrill demands for "Bucksheesh! bucksheesh!"

As they toiled upwards, the day grew perceptibly warmer, the ascent steeper. At twelve o'clock they halted by a mountain stream under some evergreen oaks, and there found an excellent repast awaiting them. Mrs. Brande's portly cook had girded up his loins, and hastened by short cuts and by-paths, and now lay in ambush with this welcome repast of fowl, cold pie, rolls and coffee; claret and hock were cooling in a neighbouring stream.

There was *some* satisfaction in being escort to Mrs. Brande, who sat on a box, presiding over the table-cloth, and looking

the embodiment of gratified hospitality. When the meal had come to an end and the men were smoking, she said—

"What's that in your dandy, Honor? I see you taking as much care of it as if it was some great treasure; not your new hats, I *hope?*" in a tone of real concern.

"No, aunt; it is my violin—a much more important affair."

"Nonsense, child! Why did you not leave it with the heavy baggage?"

"Because it might have been smashed."

"Well, if it was, it could be mended. We have a very clever Maistry carpenter at Shirani. I often give him little jobs. My butler—a Goanese—has a fiddle, too, and of an evening I hear him giving the other servants a benefit."

"Perhaps he and I may play duets," remarked Honor, demurely.

"My dear child!" with a deeply horrified air. "How can you talk in such a wild way? Captain Waring is shocked—ain't you, captain?"

"Dreadfully scandalized; and I will only condone the outrage to my feelings on one condition, that Miss Gordon plays us a solo. Will you, Miss Gordon? This is the hour and the place."

Mrs. Brande naturally expected that her niece would require at least a quarter of an hour's incessant pressing; and, indeed, in spite of what the Hodsons had told her, this benighted old person was not at all sure that it was the correct thing for a woman to play the fiddle. "Would Mrs. Langrishe allow her girl to do it?" and visions of her own fat black butler, squatting outside the house in the cool of the day playing jigs and reels to a circle of enraptured syces and chuprassis, rose before her mind's eye!

This vision was quickly dispelled by another. Honor longed for the sound of her beloved violin, her present audience were not formidable, and she was not the least nervous. Last time she had held her fiddle and bow it had been a dull wet afternoon

at home—a type of the worst grey, sullen, English weather. She had played to them in the drawing-room Schubert's "Adieu." Yes, and her mother had wept. Now, what a different scene, and different listeners! Two men, almost strangers, prone on the grass, lazily expectant, and, as far as Captain Waring was concerned, condescendingly ready to be entertained; a stout lady sitting on a wine-case, with her napkin on her knee, and her topee quite at the back of her head; a distant group of scarlet-and-white clad servants; and all around a scene fit to encircle Orpheus himself. Range after range of purple-blue hills, rising out of rhododendron and oak forests, a rival across the valley in the shape of a cuckoo, otherwise a waiting, sympathetic silence.

As the girl took the violin out of its case, Captain Waring could see that it was in hands that loved it; and noted, moreover, that the said hands were beautiful—the wrists most daintily modelled. Soon

the bow began to call forth heavenly sounds.

Honor stood up, leaning carelessly against the trunk of a tree, and seemed wholly unconscious of her audience; her face, which was turned towards the hills, gradually assumed a rapt exalted expression, and her playing was in keeping with her attitude and her eyes. The performance was a revelation—a mixture of great simplicity, with a distinct note of human passion in its strain. Surely the music was the voice of this girl's sweet soul!

The servants boldly came near to hear this new "Miss Sahib" who drew such marvellous strains from the "sitar." The very ponies pricked their ears, a rambling hill cow halted to listen, the competitive cuckoo was dumb.

The two young men gradually dropped their cigarettes. Mrs. Brande dropped her jaw. Why, her niece played as well as a man at a concert! Even better, in her opinion, for this was a tune that touched

her, and that she could understand; those sweet wailing notes, resembling a human voice, penetrated her opaque sensibilities, and wafted her to the very gates of Paradise.

Captain Waring surveyed with unaffected curiosity this fair young musician, with his elbows dug into the grass, his chin resting on his hands. He knew something about music; the girl played with faultless taste and absolute purity of tone. He was listening to "linked sweetness long drawn out" rendered with truly expressive charm. Here was not the common or ordinary Indian spin, but a modern Saint Cecilia! He glanced at Mark, to see how this unexpected transformation had affected him; but Mark's face was averted, and he gave no sign, though in reality he was enjoying a debauch of exquisite musical thoughts.

Presently the spell, a weird Russian air, died away in a long sobbing sigh, and, save for a murmur among the servants, there ensued quite a remarkable pause, broken at

length by Mrs. Brande, who exclaimed as if she had suddenly awoke—

"*Very* pretty indeed! And how did you like it, Captain Waring?"

"Like it!" he echoed indignantly. "My dear madam, what a feeble and inadequate expression! Miss Gordon plays magnificently."

"Oh indeed, no," she protested. "I can play music that I can feel—and that is easy, and I began to learn the violin when I was four years old, so that my fingers are pretty supple; but when I think of other people's playing, such as Sarasate, I realize that I am nothing more than a well-meaning amateur, and never will be otherwise. I cannot master any excessive technical difficulties. I have no brilliancy—still," with a happy little sigh, "I am glad that you liked it."

"Yes, my dear," said her aunt, nodding her head approvingly. "And now let us have something lively. Suppose you play a polka?"

But the violin was already in its case. Honor had laid it there with the air of a mother consigning an infant to its rest.

"Oh, Miss Gordon, what a shame!" expostulated Mark Jervis. "I could lie on this sunny slope, under the rhododendrons, listening to you for *days*."

"You would not find it very comfortable in the *rains*," remarked Mrs. Brande, with some asperity. She did not approve of penniless young men thus launching compliments at her accomplished niece. "And now we had better be getting on, if we are to reach Binsa before dark."

The next and last day of their march the party were proceeding as usual in pairs; Honor and Captain Waring led the van, whilst Jervis and Mrs. Brande, who was a heavy load, lagged behind. The further they journeyed, the steeper grew the precipices, the wilder the scenery, the narrower the paths. At one place in the woods, high above them, grazed a herd of

so-called tame buffaloes—tame with natives, wild with Europeans. The huge bull, with his hairy head and enormous horns—though he carried a bell—was tame with no one! Hearing strange voices below, he lifted up his hideous china-blue eyes, stared fiercely about him, and then came crashing downhill for some dozen yards, but his prey—Honor and her escort—had already passed by, and were out of reach. He stood still in a meditative attitude, and gave vent to an angry and disappointed bellow.

After a considerable interval, another group came into view. Mrs. Brande's gay jampannis and scarlet dandy rug settled the question. In half a moment he had blundered through the undergrowth, and placed himself in a warlike attitude upon the path—exactly six yards ahead of the party. The unanimity with which Mrs. Brande's bearers dropped her, and fled up trees, was only equalled by the agility displayed by the lady herself, in

leaping out of the dandy and scrambling down the khud! Nothing remained on the track but the empty vehicle, the buffalo, and Jervis.

He promptly jumped off his pony, snatched up a jampanni's pole, on the end of which he raised the red rug, and boldly advanced like a matador in the arena. When the bull lowered his ponderous head to charge, he threw the rug over his horns with as much coolness and dexterity as if he had merely to deal with a stuffed animal! But this animal was dangerously animated. Rushing furiously forward, he tumbled blindly over the dandy, and with a loud crash, rolled down the khud, which, luckily for him (and Mrs. Brande) was not of sheer descent. The lady's piercing screams attracted the notice of her niece, and—of what was far more to the purpose—the boy who was in charge of the herd. Probably he had been fast asleep, but he now came racing through the brushwood, routed up the buffalo,

whose fall had undoubtedly quenched his spirit, and drove him away, laden with the hearty curses of the jampannis. These valiant gentlemen had now descended to mother earth, as brave as lions. The rug was in ribbons, the dandy in matchwood, but no one was injured. "What was to be done?" inquired Captain Waring, vainly struggling to preserve a grave countenance, as he saw Mrs. Brande, who presented a truly distressing spectacle, emerging from the bushes, on her hands and knees. The back of her dress was split right across the shoulders, her veil hung round her neck, and she was covered with sand and bits of twigs.

Mark had hastened to her assistance, and her niece, as she picked up her topee and umbrella, asked anxiously "if she was hurt?"

"No," she panted, sitting down and dusting herself with her handkerchief, "I'm not a bit the worse."

"But your dandy is in smithereens!"

said Captain Waring. 'What is to be done?"

"I know what *has* been done. Young man," solemnly addressing herself to Jervis, "you saved my life, as sure as I sit here, and you stand there. If you had not had the courage to throw the rug over his head, he would have come down the khud, and gored me to death—I'm not a woman of many words" (fond delusion) "but I won't forget it—nor will P." In moments of unusual excitement, or when with her intimates, she invariably spoke of her husband as "P."

"Oh, Mrs. Brande," he replied, "you think a great deal too much of it—it was only a buffalo."

"Only a buffalo!" she repeated. "You little know them; in another minute I'd have been only a corpse. They are the most dangerous brutes you can come across, and so cunning. Ha," changing her voice to another and sharper key, "Jait Sing, you base coward! I shall cut every one's

pay two rupees. I've a mind to stop your wood tickets. What a contrast to *you*," she pointed her fat finger straight at Jervis. "Lions, indeed, as all these Sings call themselves — pretty lions — you are the bravest young man I ever saw!"

"Oh come, I say, Mrs. Brande," expostulated Waring, playfully. "You don't know what *I* could do if I tried."

"Well, as you did *not* try, I cannot say," she answered dryly.

"It's not such a marvellous feat, driving off an old buffalo—— "

"Depends upon the humour the buffalo is in; and I'm surprised at you belittling your own cousin, instead of being proud of him," pursued the lady with considerable heat, and entirely forgetting her intended *rôle* with respect to this millionaire.

"How are you to get on, aunt?" inquired Honor; "but of course you must go in my dandy and I can walk."

"By no means, Miss Gordon; you shall ride my pony," said Captain Waring. "He

has a grand roomy old saddle and a fine broad back, and I will hold you from slipping off."

To this arrangement Mrs. Brande (who had now recovered her composure and her wits) saw no objection. Quite the contrary, it was a capital idea. As for herself, she felt so shattered and so nervous, that she could not allow Mr. Jervis out of her sight.

They were now within seven miles of Shirani, and oh! what interminable miles—they seemed leagues—leagues of dreary monotonous road, winding and twisting round barren fawn-coloured hills, and apparently taking them straight into the very heart of Asia. They wound up and down valleys, to the crest of a range, which hid, as they fondly hoped, long-looked-for Shirani. Alas! it but gave them a view of yet another valley—yet another rounded hill slope. Honor was not surprised to hear that a lady of her aunt's acquaintance, on her first visit, had, after a series

of these maddening disappointments, collapsed on the journey, and given way to a storm of hysterical tears. Sometimes Honor walked—walked by preference, but at others, she mounted the pony in deference to her chaperon's wishes. She did not enjoy her ride, it consisted of a gradual slide, slide, slide, a recover, then slide, slide, again. She declined Captain Waring's eagerly tendered arm—support was twice as irksome as walking. Would this detestable road never, never, come to an end?

Ah, there were the pine trees of Shirani at last! In another twenty minutes, they were among them. As the little party debouched into the mall, Mrs. Brande heading the procession, Honor bringing up the rear, with Captain Waring leading her pony, they came face to face with Mrs. Langrishe, walking with her most stately air, between a soldierly looking man and a small, beautifully dressed, fair-haired girl.

Yes, she could not have failed to notice and take in the full significance of Mrs. Brande's *rentrée* (indeed she and her rival had exchanged bows), and dusty, hot, and thirsty, as that lady was, this was one of the happiest and proudest moments of her life!

CHAPTER XVI.

A MESSAGE FROM MISS PASKE.

Although she had only caught a fleeting vision of Mrs. Brande's niece, Mrs. Langrishe had sharp eyes, and one glance had been sufficient to assure her that the girl was not the least like what she had expected. She was slim and dark, and, though covered with dust, and wearing a frightful one rupee topee, undeniably a lady, and not at all of the dairymaid type.

And how exultant the old woman had looked! Literally puffed out with pride, as she was carried past, with the millionaire in close attendance. Not that *that* detail was of the slightest consequence. Lalla knew him intimately, and she would get her to

write him a nice, friendly little note, and ask him to drop in to tea.

Meanwhile Honor had been presented to her uncle, who, far from being disappointed, was agreeably surprised to find that she was the image of his favourite sister Hester, who had died when she was eighteen. This resemblance (which he kept to himself) ensured the new arrival an immediate *entrée* to her uncle's good graces. And Mrs. Brande, accustomed to his cool and rather cynical manner, was amazed at the warmth of the reception he accorded to his hitherto unknown niece.

For several days the young lady was kept at home in strict seclusion, until her complexion had recovered the journey and her boxes had arrived from the railway. Her aunt was determined not to submit her treasure to the fierce gaze which beats upon a newly arrived girl, until she was altogether at her best. She, however, could not close her doors to numerous ladies who came to call upon Miss Gordon, and thus

secure an early and private view. Honor was compelled to sit in state in a hideous drawing-room, where every colour was shouting at another, and listen to her aunt telling visitors how beautifully she played the fiddle, and what long hair she had, and how she took threes in shoes, and how useful she was in the house already. Also, she did not spare them full particulars of the buffalo adventure, nor fail to sing loud praises of Mr. Jervis, or to enlarge on his cousin's agreeable escort and particular attentions *en route*. Then Mrs. Brande discussed her servants and the outrageous price of ghee and charcoal.

"Come, let us sit in the verandah," whispered Mrs. Sladen, who had read the girl's expressive face. "You will get quite used to it," she continued, when they were outside; "you will do it yourself some day. We all do; but you will have a very happy home here, in spite of the price of potatoes! Your aunt is delighted with you, as you may see, and you will soon have plenty of

topics to discuss. She has been lonely enough till now. She and Mr. Brande, although much attached to one another, have few tastes in common. He is fond of literature, and devoted to tennis and rackets; and although he is older, he is so active that he seems years her junior. Your coming has given her a fresh start and new pleasures. She is a dear, good woman, and as single-hearted as a little child."

Mrs. Sladen and Honor had taken to one another at once. Honor had been down (after dusk) to Mrs. Sladen's house—been presented to Colonel Sladen, and shown the photographs of Mrs. Sladen's little girls —Charlotte and Mabel, and had heard their last letters—a proof that she was in high favour with their mother. Honor was not accustomed to sitting with her hands before her, and promptly found occupation in various ways — she ran messages, wrote notes and orders, arranged flowers, and ventured on respectful suggestions with regard to the drawing-room, a fine apart-

ment, expensively furnished in the worst taste imaginable—a supreme contrast to Mrs. Langrishe's room, which was the prettiest in Shirani. People little suspected how that leisurely lady dusted it entirely herself, shook out draperies, arranged flowers, and washed the china ornaments with her own delicate hands. Her room, as she understood it, made an effective background for herself—and she spared no pains to frame Ida Langrishe in the most becoming fashion. The floor was covered with fine old prayer-rugs, the tables were strewn with curios, the walls hung with valuable water colours, and scattered at suitable intervals were inviting armchairs.

Ill-natured people assured one another that the Persian rugs, carvings, and silver bowls were all so many offerings from "men." Even so Mrs. Langrishe would have been the first to admit, "Presents to Grandby and myself. Colonel Greene, a dear old thing, brought us the carpet from Peshawar; and Mr. Goldhoofe sent those

silver things from Delhi. I must say that our friends never forget us."

Mrs. Langrishe, as we know, had fully determined to hand over the drawing-room to her niece, it would be such good practice for the child, and really the flowers took up an hour every morning. She would find many ways of making Lalla useful. But that young lady steadily objected to these plans, she immediately made her aunt aware that she considered herself merely ornamental. "Oh dear no! she never arranged flowers, she had no taste in that line, and besides, it would spoil her hands. *Dust* the drawing-room! dear Aunt Ida must be joking; why, that was the bearer's business. Get out the dessert! oh!" with a peal of ringing laughter, "she was not to be trusted. She would eat every chocolate, and all the best French sweets!"

So whilst Mrs. Langrishe laboured, as usual, over her household tasks, her fair niece, with a locked door, lay upon her

bed, reading a novel, tried new experiments in the hairdressing line, or wrote notes. No, no; she had not come to Shirani to be a lady-help. She had always heard that her aunt Ida was very *clever*; but, luckily, she had her wits about her also!

During Honor Gordon's period of enforced retirement, she went early every morning for a solitary walk along a pretty sandy road, that wound among the dark aromatic pine woods—a road with sharp angles, and deep leafy ravines, green with ferns and ivy. It was early in May, and the ground was strewn with pine-needles, which deadened the footfall; the firs were thin and bare, and through their dark branches she caught glimpses of the snows, that like a great white rampart hung in mid-air, between a brilliant blue sky and an opal-tinted mist. Honor enjoyed these rambles immensely, though she rarely met a soul, save a syce exercising a horse, or an ayah wheeling a

perambulator. Her sole companion was "Ben," who luckily had "taken to her," and with whom she had established relations of such a friendly character, that she had actually been installed in the unexpected position of his "aunt."

Occasionally they made joint excursions down the khud, he in search of the private larders of other dogs, she in quest of ferns and moss for table decoration. Ben was a personage of such importance at Rookwood that he demands half a chapter to himself. He was a dog with fixed opinions, and hated Mrs. Langrishe—and one or two other people—in the same degree that he hated cold boiled meat. Sport was his passion, the chewing up of Suède gloves his weakness. He was a fox-terrier with a history. As a pup, he had been presented by a man to a girl, on the principle of "love me love my dog," but alas, the false maiden had loved neither the one nor the other; she heartlessly jilted the man, and abandoned the dog to his fate. However,

her ayah (prudent soul) ere she went down the hill, sold the pup to a bheestie for the sum of two annas (an ancient debt), he happened to be Mrs. Brande's servant, and was excessively vain of his purchase, but left him most of the day tied by a strip of pink calico to a conspicuous tree in her compound, where he suffered him to "eat the air," and but little else. Mrs. Brande, *en route* to feed her well-to-do fowls, noticed the famishing animal; and as she often threw him a crust, he naturally hailed her advent with extravagant demonstrations of delight and feeble yelps of joy. Her easily softened heart was touched by the raptures of the starving puppy, and after some parley she bought him from the bheestie for the sum he swore he had paid —to wit, ten rupees—in order to feed him up and get him a good master. But Ben was thoroughly satisfied with his present quarters, and soon made himself completely at home. He displayed an easy intimacy with armchairs and cushions, he had un-

doubtedly been accustomed to sweet biscuits and to good society, and his mistress pointed out with just pride that he understood English perfectly! Of course she eventually adopted "Ben," he made himself indispensable, he refused to be separated from his patroness, and became her shadow, and soon ceased to be a shadow himself. He grew from a dirty, starving, shivering whelp, into an extremely handsome dog, with a fine gloss on his coat. Did he ever remember his own evil days, as he lounged of an afternoon sunning himself at the gate of Rookwood, and passed in scornful review, curs less happy and of low degree? Are dogs snobs?

Whether snob or not, Ben was brave, he lowered his tail to none, and when the big wild cat that created such havoc among the poultry, went to ground under the messhouse, "Ben Brande," as he was called, was the only one of the assembled mob of terriers, who, as a looker on expressed it, "was man enough to follow him, kill him,

and drag him out." Ben Brande lost an eye thereby, but gained a magnificent reputation.

Of course Ben was spoiled. His mistress talked to him incessantly; he had his own little charpoy in her room, his morning tea in her company, and now and then he was permitted to invite his pal "Jacko," a red terrier, to dine and spend the day! (Once they had elected to spend it quietly in Mr. Brande's dressing-room, where they devoured several pairs of boots, a sponge-bag, and the back of "Nancy.") Ben escorted his mistress in her walks and drives. Many a time she went out solely on his account, and it was an indisputable fact that he had favourite roads, and his "grandmamma"—as the infatuated lady called herself—always studied his wishes. On those occasions when "his grandpapa and grandmamma" were dining abroad, he never went to bed, but established himself at the entrance until their return (however late), and passers-by

could always tell that the Brandes were at a "burra khana" when they saw an upright little white figure sitting by the gatepost. Indeed it was whispered, that the reason Mrs. Brande was always so early to depart, was simply that she did not like to keep Ben waiting up! She never said so, but every one knew that Ben was the real motive for her premature departure. And this was the animal who now accompanied Honor, and who had accorded her his patronage and friendship. One morning, as they were strolling homewards, he with a large stone in his mouth, and she carrying an armful of ferns, they nearly came into collision with another couple—the angles were abrupt—walking noiselessly on pine needles. They proved to be Toby Joy, who was also attended by a dog, and sauntering along hand-in-hand with a young lady, a dainty, white-skinned little person, with fluffy light hair, small keen eyes, admirably arched brows and a tip-tilted nose.

Honor was by far the most embarrassed of the trio, and blushed a good healthy blush—of which she was heartily ashamed. Why should not other people enjoy the delicious morning air? As to walking hand-in-hand, *she* ought to be the last person to object; had she not walked hand-in-hand herself with an absolute stranger?

"Good morning, Miss Gordon," said Toby, slowly relinquishing Miss Paske's fingers, and doffing his cap. "So you have got up here all right in spite of the buffalo! Let me introduce you to Miss Paske."

The girls bowed, and looked at one another gravely.

"We are getting up that burlesque I told you about, and have come out early to study our part together."

"How praiseworthy of you," said Honor, in simple good faith. "And what is the piece to be?"

"*The Babes in the Wood*," responded Miss Paske with an odd smile, and looking Honor over with her bright little eyes.

"Don't you think it will be suitable to the dear simple people at Shirani?"

"I really don't know," replied the other, with a puzzled face.

"Well, I hope you will come to see it," and with a patronizing nod she moved on. But Ben and Jumbo (Mrs. Langrishe's dog) were not disposed to part thus! The household feud had evidently extended to them. They had been tiptoeing round one another for some time, with considerable stiffness in their gait, emitting low and insulting growls, that now culminated in a sort of gurgling snarl, as they flew at one another's throats. Miss Paske gave a little stifled shriek, and scrambled hastily up the bank, whilst Honor and Toby made desperate attempts to separate the combatants. They each caught hold of a dog by whatever came first, leg or tail; but the dogs refused to be parted, and to and fro, and up and down, they struggled and scrambled in a mutual frenzy. Meanwhile, Lalla, who was now at a safe elevation, actually appeared delighted at

the performance, and laughed and clapped her hands ecstatically. At last, by the expedient of pouring sand on their heads, the dogs were choked off, and each side was bottle-holder to a furious, panting, struggling animal.

"I think we had better separate at once," gasped Honor, who only restrained Ben with the greatest difficulty.

"Yes, the sooner the better," agreed Toby, who was also wrestling with an eager armful.

As Honor turned homewards, with Ben hanging longingly over her shoulder, Miss Paske, who had tripped down from her coign of 'vantage, called after her, in her sweetest, clearest tones—

"Be sure you tell Mrs. Brande, that *her* dog got the worst of it."

END OF VOL. I.

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